

MARY'S ALABASTER BOX.

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Co.

The old friends in the Dudley-Street Church, who for nearly nineteen years listened patiently and lovingly to the words of my mouth, and to the new friends in the Emmanuel Church, whose earnest attention is a fresh inspiration from Sunday to Sunday, these words from my pen are affectionately

DEDICATED.

PREFATORY.

THE contents of this volume have, for the most part, appeared in the religious press. The larger part of the chapters have been published as articles in *The Standard* of Chicago. Some of them have been published in *The Zion's Advocate* of Portland ; others in *The Religious Herald* of Richmond, and in the *The Criterion* of Albany. They are now collected in a more permanent form with the hope that they may be spiritually helpful in hours of meditation, strengthening Christian faith and quickening the religious life.

The title of the first chapter has been given to the book for two reasons : first, because every book must have a title ; and second, because this little volume, though it does not presume to think itself "ointment of spikenard very precious," would pour all its fragrance on the feet of him "whom having not seen, we love ; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing, we rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory."

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I. MARY'S ALABASTER BOX.



I.

MARY'S ALABASTER BOX.

There was no more beautiful incident in the life of our Saviour than his anointing in the house of Simon, the leper. It was Mary who brought and broke the precious alabaster box. The disciples indignantly re-proved ; but Jesus lovingly approved, and embalmed the name of Mary and the memory of her beautiful deed in the amber of the everlasting gospel, and spread the fragrance of the act not only through that little Judean home, but through all lands and all homes to the latest time. It was a momentary act, but it should be held in perpetual remembrance. It was the sudden impulse of a loving heart, but Christ endowed it with immortality.

What gave to this act of Mary its immortal worth, and secured for it such recognition and commendation ?

First, it was done unto Christ. How much Jesus may have meant by the words, "She did it for my burial," whether Mary's "insight of love" was a kind of prophetic foresight and she acted with some conscious foreshadowing of his approaching death and burial, or whether she was an unconscious prophetess and Christ saw in her act a beautiful meaning unknown

to her, we may not be able to determine. But this we do know, the act was done directly unto Christ. It was his head and his feet that she anointed. It was an expression of her ardent love to him whom she accepted as the promised Messiah, and her soul's Redeemer. She had before her the visible object of her heart's adoration, and on his not unwilling person she lavished the wealth of her offering. As Christ said, "She hath wrought a good work *upon me*," "She did it for *me*, for *my burial*."

There is a great deal of so-called charity in the world, which has no Christ in it. It is not done unto him. It may be done from a love of personal honor, or from humane motives, sympathy with suffering, a yielding to the better instincts of our common nature. But it is not charity of the highest order. It lacks one element of immortality. It has in it no thought of Christ. It is not done out of love to Christ. It is not done with a conscious desire to be like Christ. Men may erect memorials of it in stone, or bronze, or eloquent speech; but it has never been laid on Christ's altar, as the offering of a grateful soul to him; it has never been sanctified by a Christian faith; it has never been made immortal by Christ's acceptance and benediction.

We cannot now have the visible person of the Saviour with us, on whose head we may pour our offerings, at whose feet we may lay our service. Yet it is possible

for us even now so to have Christ before us in all our thoughts, and his love so diffused in our hearts that our charities, our services, our lives may be as a costly and acceptable offering unto him. Christ has taught us the blessed possibility of living now directly and constantly unto him, of seeing him in every benevolent cause, and his lineaments in the face of every sorrowing and needy suppliant, and of hearing in the evils and miseries which afflict the human family the tender tones of his own pleading voice. Did he not say, "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward?" Or, as Mark puts it, still more strikingly, "Whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." In like manner, in the graphic picture of the final judgment, we are taught that Christ so identifies himself now with every humble disciple that whatsoever is done unto them is done unto him, and that even the eternal awards are to be thus determined.

What a vast difference it would make in the service which we render, its nature and amount, and in the lives which we live, their quality and their usefulness, if we could always remember that Christ may still be the direct object of affection, and thought, and effort ;

that what we do we are to do unto him, and that only such service and such living have any gracious acknowledgment by him, or any promise or hope of immortal remembrance.

The peculiar worth and virtue of Mary's act consisted, secondly, in the fact that it was done regardless of expense and undoubtedly at great self-denial. The ointment, very precious, had a money value of many pounds. It cost the earnings of a mechanic, in those days, for a whole year. Mary might have been long in accumulating so large a sum. Yet to her it had no other value than this, that she could give it to Christ. And so she poured it without stint, entirely, "wastefully," the indignant disciples, headed by the wicked Judas, said, upon the head of Jesus. If she had used a little on Christ, and preserved the large remainder for her own use, it might have occasioned no remark. If she had kept it all for herself, none of them might have once thought that she was withholding anything from the poor. But it was when Mary broke and emptied the box on the dear head of her Saviour, that the cost seemed so great and the expenditure extravagant, and the duty of economy and of benevolence, and the needs of the poor, seemed matters of such vast importance in the eyes of all.

But Mary's generosity, like her love, was without stint. It stopped not to reckon money values or to

think of the cost of its offering. If it had, it would have said, it is all too little. It had its treasured box, and it thought—this is my opportunity. It could spare it, because it would spare it. It forgot the value of its gift in the joy of making it, and undoubtedly was surprised when it was reminded how much it cost. And so, generously, self-forgettingly, lovingly it poured out its offering, adding to its delicious fragrance the diviner fragrance of its own spirit.

Does Mary's conduct, by its contrast and unlikeness, remind us of our own? How we lavish our days and years upon the world, its cares and pleasures, and think nothing of it, if only we are successful in what we seek! But we count the hours carefully, and even the moments, which we give to God and his service, and reckon them at their highest market value, never forgetting to put them down on the debit side of our account with God. We pour out our pounds wastefully on the altar of selfishness and luxury, and then split our pennies when we make an offering to Christ. Oh, for a love like Mary's in all of our hearts, which will make us extravagant in our devotion to our divine Master, and entirely forgetful of the cost of what we do, if Jesus will only give us an opportunity to serve him, and own and bless the service which we render.

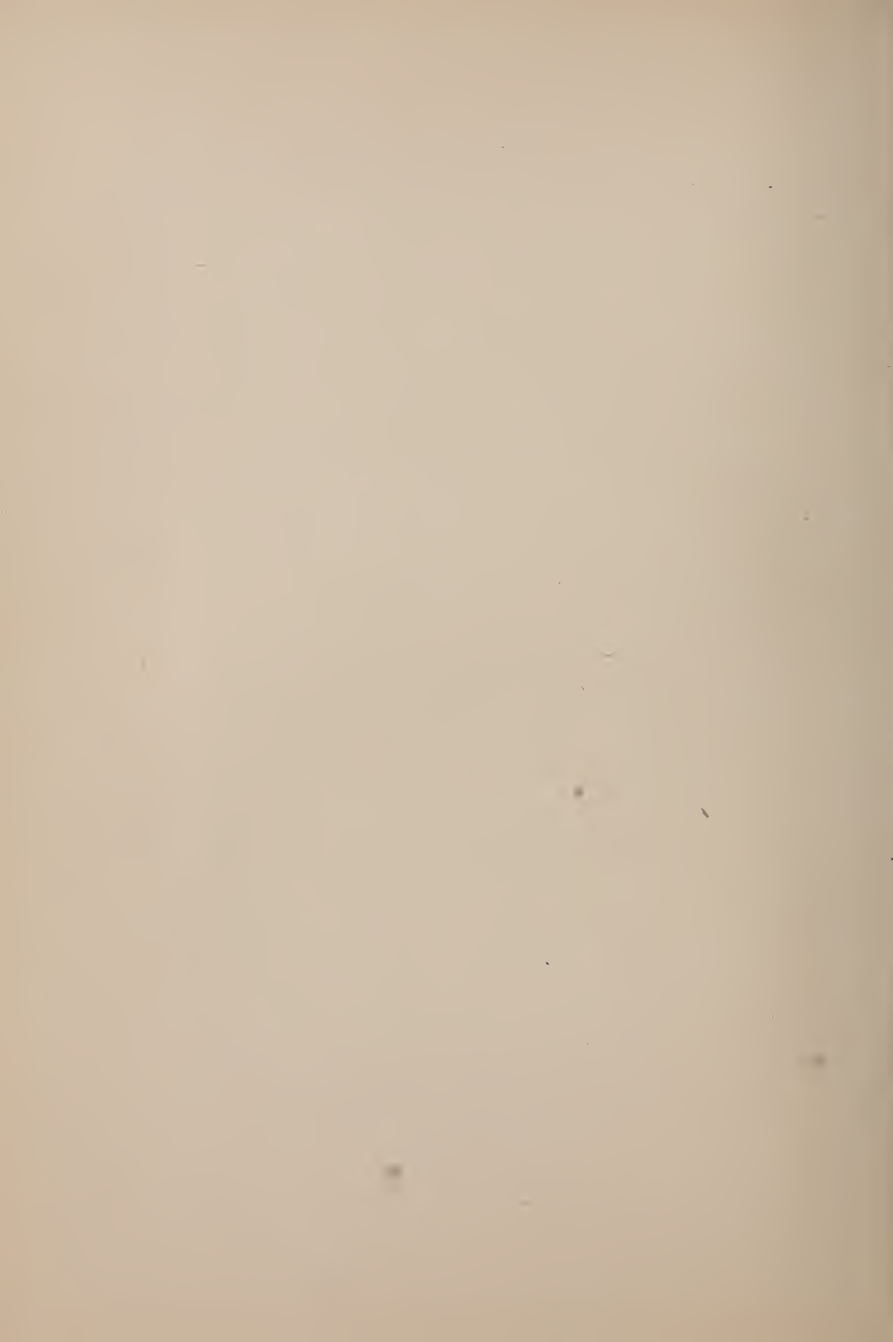
Once more: the peculiar excellence of Mary's act consisted also in this: that it was done regardless of

the approval or disapproval of men. Mary evidently did not stop to think how the others would view what she was about to do. If she had, with a love so strong as hers, it would have made no difference. Should they approve, well and good. Should they disapprove, no matter. Her love demanded expression, some visible form and body, some mould into which its moulten stream could run, some channel in which its pure waters could flow, and it would have required more than the fear of adverse criticism, and more than open objection and opposition to deter her from the execution of her purpose. The frowns which gathered on all faces, the lips which uttered their words of condemnation, had no effect upon her loving and resolute heart. She went right on till the service was done, and she had gently anointed his head and then his feet, and wiped them with her flowing locks. Then, when she had completed her holy and significant service, unmoved by the disapprobation of all the others, she looked up into the face of her approving Lord and heard his sweet words of unexpected commendation, and her happy heart was more than satisfied.

Oh, followers of the same Jesus! is not this the reason why we are so often deterred from some known duty, from some inviting service for Christ, from the execution of some good purpose formed, it may be, in prayer, because our love is not so deep, so full, so

strong that it *must have expression* ? We take counsel with our fears. We purchase the alabaster box, it may be, but we dare not break it. We are intimidated by the thought of unfriendly criticism, and care more to avoid the disapproval of men than to win the approval of God and of conscience.

Oh, for a love to Christ whose current shall be so deep and strong that it will sweep away all barriers, and flow on and on in the open channel of a noble service for Christ and our fellowmen, a love that will demand expression, that will seek it and find it in ways which may sometimes startle a cold and calculating prudence, and put to shame a lifeless indifference, and which, like Mary's, will live in the sunshine of Christ's commendation, and make its influence felt when these hearts have ceased to beat and these hands are folded to their long rest ! Such a love is possible for us all. It will transfigure the life which we live. It will fill with its fragrance, like Mary's precious spikenard, the home which we occupy, the sphere in which we move, and all our life in the church and in the world, and ascending to heaven like sweet incense, it will find acceptance there, and become, it may be, an everlasting memorial of the soul.



II. MY CHURCH MEMBER.



II.

MY CHURCH-MEMBER.

You may not know her name, but God knows it, and that is enough. Just as the November sun was sinking below the horizon her weary spirit took its upward flight to the home and the bosom of God. But the glory of the setting sun was pale and weak in comparison with the glory of that life which then came to its earthly end. For more than half a century she had been a faithful and devoted member of the church. For four score years and five God spared her to know and do his will; and, when her work of patience and labor of love was done, and she had ripened under life's discipline and fulfilled all her stewardship, God took her to himself and to her rest and reward.

She was one of the old-time Christians, whose life was spent in living near to God, who had many and frequent hours of communion with him, to whom her vows of consecration were sacred things to be often solemnly renewed, and who longed from day to day for greater spirituality of mind and for a deeper consciousness of God's love and grace to her. Among her private papers was found the long-kept diary of her religious exercises, which revealed unwonted breathings after an ascending, a more heavenly life. She lived

among us a life quiet, affectionate, happy, useful (God only knows how useful), caring most of all for the friendship of Christ and his people, with whom was all her delight. Owing to great bodily suffering and consequent mental weakness, she had not that triumphant departure from earth which she had anticipated. But the Saviour was still her trust and refuge. She feared no evil, for he was with her; his rod and staff they comforted her. Only a few hours before her spirit found its happy release, though her mind was wandering about other things, it fastened on that beautiful hymn expressive of her Christian faith —

“Jesus, lover of my soul,
Let me to thy bosom fly” —

and her feeble lips repeated it, verse after verse, without hesitation or aid. The hymn has been clothed with a new sacredness to me, because it was associated with my parting hour with this aged saint.

But she was best known and will be longest remembered because of her generous contributions to the church and objects of Christian benevolence. Being possessed of an income, not over large, she lived quietly, economically and self-denyingly, that she might have more to lay upon the altar of Christ. We were often deceived as to the amount of her income by the largeness and munificence of her charities. She looked upon herself as God's steward, and cheerfully sought

to be faithful to her trust. Her charity money, which was in reality no small part of her income, was lovingly set apart and lovingly given, and she had no greater joy than this, that God had bestowed upon her the ability to help the poor and needy, and to aid in advancing his kingdom in the world. What she gave she gave as to the Lord and not to men. She saw his loving face in every needy object, and heard his loving voice in every pleading appeal, so that her charity was not partial, and did not flow in any single channel. It was responsive to all need, and wide as the world. The church of Christ, which she loved, human suffering in every form, the cause of ministerial education, of tract distribution, of home missions, and especially of foreign missions, were all made to rejoice in her practical sympathy and frequent remembrance. The church, the community, the whole country, the whole world was filled with the fragrance of her loving deeds.

Moreover, she thought not of the value of what she gave. Its only value to her was that Christ would accept it and use it for his glory. When a great conflagration had consumed much of her income, she expressed but one regret, namely, that her ability to do good was greatly lessened. But she planned to live a little closer, and to curtail her personal wants, that thereby she might lengthen out her contributions. Surely the poor made happy by her thoughtful charity,

many a needy minister and feeble church aided by her timely benevolence, the distant heathen to whom she sent the saving power of the Gospel, though her name was unheard and unknown among them, all will rise up to call her blessed. "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord, that they may rest from their labors, and their works do follow them."

In her death the cause of Christ lost a generous contributor, the poor a sympathizing helper, spiritual religion a shining example, and her church a loving and faithful member, for her prayers and her contributions were wrought into its history and its prosperity. So long as the walls of that church remain standing, so long as that church as a spiritual body has an existence on the earth, "this that this woman hath done shall be told as a memorial of her." I thank God that she was my church-member, for my heart is made glad at every remembrance of her. She seemed a modern Mary. She loved to sit at the feet of Jesus and learn of him, and she broke many an alabaster box of precious nard, if not for the anointing, for the crowning of the head of her exalted Saviour.

III. THE INCARNATION.



III.

THE INCARNATION.

The birth of Jesus was no ordinary event. Unlike all other births, it was the beginning of a life that was unlike all other lives. That this birth should be singled out among so many millions to be commemorated in all lands, and through all ages, makes it easy for us to believe that there was something miraculous about it.

1. The miracle of the incarnation is the most readily accepted of all the miracles of the Bible. Men may hesitate about accepting the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, and may stumble at the raising of the dead and at the resurrection of Christ himself, and yet cheerfully accept the wonderful and beautiful story of the birth of the Christ-child. This seems to commend itself to the religious instincts or the deepest wishes of men. It is an interesting fact that the doctrine of a divine incarnation has been the common teaching of the great religions of the world. Mr. Edwin Arnold finds in the religion of Guatama, which is the accepted religion of one-third of the human family, the doctrine of

“ A holy child
Of wondrous wisdom, profiting all flesh,

Who shall deliver men from ignorance,
Or rule the world, if he will deign to rule."

Whether it be the sense of the divine still remaining in man which makes it easy for him to believe in a complete incarnation, or a sense of need in man which makes him long for a full manifestation of God among men in proffered sympathy, wisdom and power, we may not tell. But the fact is apparent that the doctrine of the incarnation is the most widely accepted and the most welcome of all religious truths. Men do not turn from it in defiant unbelief. At its threshold skepticism often stays its rash feet, and leaves unassailed this wonderful desire of all nations, this beautiful hope of the human heart. Men seem ready to welcome the Christmas festival, and give to it something of its spiritual significance, as celebrating the marvellous birth of a marvellous babe into this world of ours. And yet, the miracle of the incarnation, when rightly apprehended, is one of the most stupendous of all miracles. I doubt whether there is another wonder from the creation of the world to the resurrection of Christ, that is grander or more sublime than this. Is it not the wonder of all wonders? Is it incredible that angels should announce it? Is not the whole marvellous environment of the incarnation in keeping with so great an event? And so it happens that the greatest

miracle in the world's history is the most widely accepted of all, and finds annual recognition in the Christmas observance of men.

2. The miracle of the incarnation carries with it the credibility of the other miraculous displays of power which the gospels contain. A man who believes in the supernatural birth of Christ ought not to find it difficult to accept the inspired record of other miracles. This greatest exhibition of the miraculous being accepted, all that follows will be found to be in keeping with it. This is the introduction which gives character to the whole. A supernatural birth will be followed, we should expect, by a supernatural life. A child whose birth is such a marvel will be a marvel at whatever time you meet him, and from whatever point you view him. A dispensation whose opening act is so above the ordinary course of things, will be likely to move on in that higher and supernatural plane. Things which would be unnatural to us, and at this time, would be perfectly natural to Christ and to the circumstances of his life. Let it be granted that Christmas means something, that it is observed in commemoration of the birth of a divine child, and you will not be surprised when you find in his life the evident tokens of his divinity; indeed, you will be surprised if you do not find them there. All subsequent miracles which he wrought fall into line with the miracle of his birth.

One of the most impressive things about the life of Christ was its wonderful unity and consistency. There was nothing in it discordant or out of harmony. The key-note was given at his birth, and all the song that followed was in happy and unbroken accord. Dr. Bushnell has said of this "Being who has broken into this world and is not of it," that, "being a miracle himself, it would be the greatest of all miracles if he did not work miracles." And Dr. Schaff has said, in language strikingly similar, "He is the great central miracle of the whole gospel history. All his miracles are but the natural and necessary manifestations of his miraculous person, and hence they were performed with the same ease with which we perform our ordinary daily works. In the gospel of St. John they are simply and justly called his 'works.' It would be the greatest miracle, indeed, if he who is a miracle himself should have performed no miracles."

3. The miracle of the incarnation carries with it the credibility of all the truths of the gospel. It is difficult to separate the teachings of Christ from his works. He taught by his works as well as by his words, and many of his most sublime truths are crystallized around the miracles which he wrought, and inseparably connected with them. All of his miracles were in some sense his divine credentials, disclosing to men his true character and his holy mission, as when he said, at the healing of

the palsied man, "that ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins;" in other words, that ye may know who I am and what I came to do on earth, I say to this sick man, "Arise, take up thy bed and walk." But there is no miracle that more clearly establishes Christ's claim to be "a Teacher sent from God" than the miracle of the incarnation, which bears testimony to his divine origin and Sonship, and proclaims him to be the very light of the world. To accept the incarnation in all its spiritual significance is to acknowledge the kingly power of Christ's words, is to accept the truth of his teachings as to man, his nature, his danger, and his destiny, as to himself, his character, and his mission, and as to this life and the life to come, is to bow down to the supreme authority of Christ as the one great Teacher of the ages in the realms of morals and of spirit, and confess him, in the words of his own high claim, as "the way, the truth, and the life" for the world. The child of such a birth will be presumably free from all error, guilty of no falsehood or deception, the bearer of some heavenly revelation, the true Prophet of God's will to men, among whom he is to rule by the might of omnipotent and eternal truth. To observe Christmas and feel not the power of Christ's word in the soul, and bow not to the supremacy of his saving truth, is to be guilty of the gravest inconsistency and folly. "To this end

was I born," said Christ to Pilate, "and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." Unless the truth as it is in Jesus has brought us under its blessed dominion, and we have become its loving and obedient disciples, the Babe of Bethlehem was born in vain, and his mission for us is not yet fulfilled.

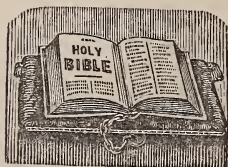
4. Once more : the miracle of the incarnation establishes the important fact that you and I have a Saviour, earth-born and heaven-born, Son of Mary and Son of God, all-merciful and almighty. It was no common malefactor whom those old Jews bore away to the cursed cross and put to death. It was no friendless, unknown criminal who was there left to suffer and die. Earth and heaven had echoed with his name, and the long ages had been filled with the promise of his coming. I hear his name whispered by God in the garden in that first word of hope to our sinning parents. I see it written in type and symbol and bleeding sacrifice of God's ancient people. I find it inscribed on prophecy and psalm, to be read and sung in the public service of the temple, and in quiet hours of communion with God. I catch its echo as it is borne over the earth's surface and up to heaven on the wail of human needs and sorrows and sins, generation after generation, as it passes

on, uttering its mournful cry, "Oh, that I knew where I might find him!" Until at last in the fullness of time, angelic choirs accompanying him to the very threshold of his earthly mission, announce the advent of this new-born Prince and Saviour, and into the home of Mary there comes the foretold glory of his people, Israel, and the light whose rays should stream out over the Gentile world.

In the miracle of Christ's birth, then, which wedded heaven and earth in a closer fellowship than had existed since man's fall, I behold the pledge of heaven's sympathy to earth's sad and bereaved ones, the pledge of heaven's help to earth's weak and tempted ones, and the pledge of heaven's forgiveness to earth's sinning and penitent ones. The heart of that Son holds in its strong embrace not only Mary, but all the mothers and all the sons of men. Those soft feet have walked the earth with the tread of a mighty conqueror. Those sweet lips have spoken the word of life to the world's sleeping millions. Those tiny hands have broken off the strong shackles of sin, and battered down the stony gates of death and the grave. Because the manger contained the divine Christ-child, the cross sustained the Prince of Peace, and by its mighty attraction and its healing virtue it has become the power of God unto salvation to the nations of a lost world.

“Uplift his cross, the idols fall ;
Descends the dove, the eagles fly ;
Another Cæsar sounds his call
To men and nations far and nigh,
Proclaiming David’s son divine :
Christ reigns upon the Palatine.

“Hail, Prince of Peace ! hail, King of Kings !
Who would not hail thy day of birth,
Sunshine with healing in his wings,
Light, love and joy to all the earth !
Once more let all men be enrolled,
Thou the One Shepherd — in one fold.”



IV. A STUDY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

IV.

A STUDY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST.

The significant reply of John the Baptist was "He must increase, but I must decrease." John's moon was in its wane. Christ's was the crescent moon, which should fill out to its full-orbed beauty, and wane no more. It has been remarked, by way of illustration, that John the Baptist's day in the calendar is the longest day in the year, the 24th of June, and from that time the days begin to shorten; while Christmas day, on which is celebrated the birth of our Saviour, is one of the shortest days in the year, and from it the days grow longer.

John ever looked upon himself as simply a forerunner, a prophet in advance, to prepare the way for a Greater who was to come. He said of himself, "I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness—make straight the way of the Lord." And when the multitude flocked unto him to receive baptism at his hands, aroused by his earnest words, and ready to declare themselves his followers, he impressed upon them the fact that his work was only preparatory, and pointed them away from himself to the coming One, saying: "I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance; but he that

cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear ; he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." It looks very much as if, in the unsettled state of religious feeling and general fever of expectation, the people were ready, not to say eager, to acknowledge John as the promised Messiah, and that this wish on their part he was constantly compelled to resist. "He confessed and denied not ; but confessed I am not the Christ." And when Christ came forth from the retirement of his youth and early manhood to enter upon his public ministry, John immediately and gladly acknowledged him and his claims : "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world." His joy was the joy of one whose anxious waiting is ended, and whose prophecy is fulfilled. "This is he," he exclaimed, "of whom I said, after me cometh a man which is preferred before me ; for he was before me."

And subsequently, when John's disciples in a fit of jealousy, because they saw the growing favor, the ascendancy of Jesus, and the people flocking to him for baptism as they used to flock to John, came to him to complain about it, John quieted them by telling them this is as it ought to be and as I told you it would be. "Ye yourselves bear me witness that I said I am not the Christ, but that I am sent before him." And then he exhibited his freedom from all jealousy,

or rivalry, or disappointed ambition by the very happy and beautiful illustration, "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice; this my joy, therefore is fulfilled." John meant to say, I am simply the friend of the Bridegroom. I came not to win the affections of the bride, which is the Church of Christ, but to prepare the way for the heavenly Bridegroom; and now that he has come, and I hear his voice, my mission and my joy are alike fulfilled. Then he adds the sententious words: "He must increase, but I must decrease."

We are wont to think of John the Baptist as possessing a stern and rugged character, severe in his spirit as in his diet and dress, strong, even vehement, in his denunciations, having about him something of the wildness of the wilderness in which he preached, rough and brusque in his manner, independent in his methods of working, and having little refinement and delicacy of feeling. So he is painted by the old artists. But this view of his character is an utterly mistaken one. He was, indeed, plain, and honest, and outspoken in his preaching. He was no time-server. He uttered a call to repentance, and under his earnest and faithful appeals men were made to tremble and to submit to his significant baptism. So holy and just was he that the wicked Herod feared him,

and yet he was so discreet and persuasive of speech that it is said that when Herod heard him, he did many things and heard him gladly. It is one of the most difficult duties to tell a man the truth about himself, and give him honest counsel, and at the same time secure his confidence and obedience. This John did to Herod. And there were such simplicity and meekness, as well as nobility and grandeur about this old prophet, that Christ said of him in loving recognition : " Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist."

See how his humility and sincerity shine out in the fact that he knew his place and his mission, and was content with them. He was not eaten up with unholy ambition. His followers would have acknowledged him as the Messiah. They wanted to do it. They seemed determined to do it. But he resisted all their endeavors, refusing the honors which they were ready to heap upon him, and persisting in declaring himself the simple prophet and forerunner of Jesus, that he was. In all his preaching he put Christ to the front, and himself to the rear. He never allowed the thoughts of his hearers to rest on himself, but always pointed them to him who was to come. " There cometh one after me that is mightier than I." " I am not he." " This is he of whom I told you." " Behold the Lamb of God." Oh, how true he was to the place where God put him

and the mission which God gave him, willing to be just there, and to do just that, and nothing more !

Then, too, see his great magnanimity, for he could see his own star declining, and that of Jesus rising more and more, and yet not only be free from all bitterness and jealousy, but rejoice in it with a real and holy joy. This, it seems to me, was evidence of the highest manhood. I had almost said, of a spirit more than human. For how apt men are to rejoice in their own exaltation, even though it be at the expense of another ; how apt to think to lift one's self up by putting another down, to think to increase one's own brightness and glory by casting another into the shade, to think to magnify one's own reputation by depreciating another's ! How difficult it is to rejoice in another's advancement and prosperity, and have no touch of envy and no feeling of bitterness, to find yourself, it may be, growing poorer and poorer, and less and less noticed, while your neighbor is on the high road of success, and enjoys the sunlight of popular favor ! A retiring minister might find it something of a test of his piety to see himself dropping out of the affections of his people who are dear to him as life itself, and his successor taking his place. All men are human. While visiting recently the battle-fields of the rebellion, and recalling the sad scenes of other days, there was nothing that so stirred my soul with indignation as the thought that

more than one victory was lost, and thousands of precious lives sacrificed, because of a rivalry among our generals — some fearing lest others should gain distinguishing honors, and therefore failing to come to their support.

What a beautiful illustration we have in John of that unselfish, magnanimous spirit which is so rare in the world! We must remember that Jesus was looked upon, at least by John's disciples, as in some sense his rival. Jesus' disciples had been, in very many instances, John's disciples. They left John to follow Christ. Christ's authority was increasing. His followers were increasing. His kingdom was being built up, we may say, on the ruins of John's influence and success. It was natural, at least it was according to human nature, that John should sympathize with the feelings of his disciples who remained with him. But no; with a noble freedom from envy, and a noble self-forgetfulness, he saw what was taking place, and rejoiced in it, and could gladly see his own influence waning, if Christ's was only increasing; willing that his star should go down in forgetfulness and oblivion, if he could only see Christ's star ascend into mid heaven and fill the whole earth with its effulgence.

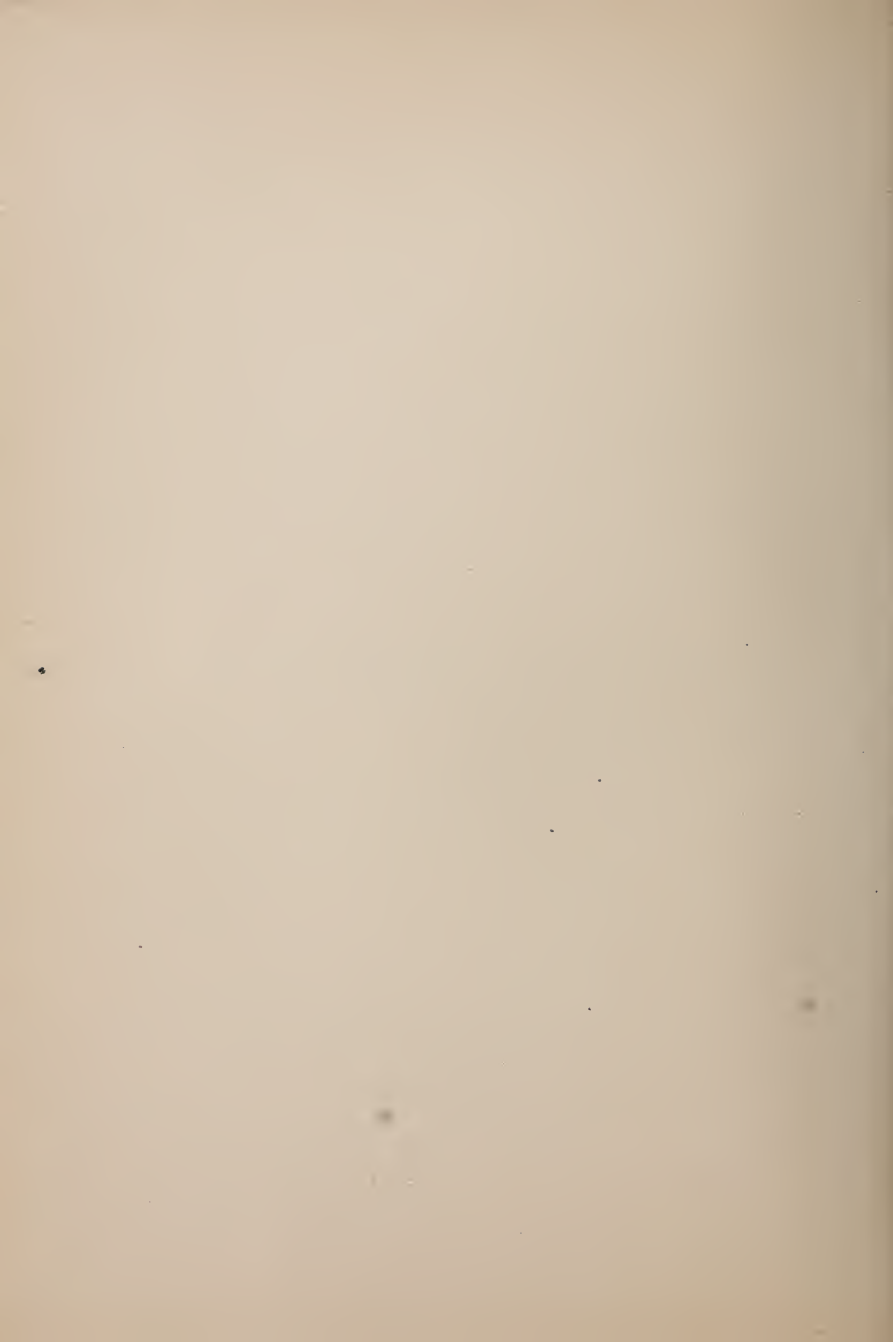
And so his words were the maxim of his own life, and a prophecy for the future. Christ's kingdom and power and dominion should increase everywhere and

evermore. John's disciples should disappear, but Christ's should be multiplied. John's influence should die, but Christ's should live, until the whole earth should be brought under its control. "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Let us think more of John the Baptist, and of his noble, magnanimous character than we have been wont, and let us try to possess his rare and beautiful spirit, for these words of his contain not only the secret of his life, but the rule and maxim of all Christian living. There must be the gradual increase of Christ in the soul, and the gradual disappearance of self.



V. THE INCREASING CHRIST, AND THE
DECREASING SELF.



V.

THE INCREASING CHRIST AND THE DECREASING SELF.

The significant reply of John the Baptist, "He must increase, but I must decrease," contained not only the secret of his own life, but the rule and maxim of every Christian life. There must be the gradual increase of Christ, and the gradual disappearance of self.

And by "self" I mean not personality, not you as a whole, as a conscious being. That is not to disappear, or to be weakened, or to grow less, but rather to be strengthened and developed. When we speak in the language of the Bible, of Christ's becoming "all in all," we do not think of a kind of Christian pantheism, or Buddhistic annihilation, by which personality, consciousness, self, is to be lost and swallowed up in Christ. No man is so much himself as the Christian. No man preserves so much of himself as the Christian. It was when the prodigal came to himself, that is, when he found his lost self, that he returned to his father. The Christian finds his life. He saves his soul, that spirit of his which is personal, conscious, loving, immortal, which is to go on expanding throughout the endless eternities, in "increasing knowledge, increasing

powers, increasing occupations." That is not the self that is to be destroyed but to be kept, not the self that is to decrease, but to increase.

But I use the word "self" as referring to that tendency or part of man's nature which refuses to bow to the supremacy of the will of God, and resists the work and spirit of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what the Scriptures call "the heart of stone," "the law of sin," "the old man with his deeds." It is this self, which in the unrenewed heart is regnant and supreme, that must decrease more and more, and will decrease as Christ is allowed to increase in the soul.

This self appears, first, in the form of *self-will*. This indicates a man's attitude towards his Maker. There ought to be but one supreme will in the universe. He who made all should govern all. The child who sets up his will against wise parental authority, introduces rebellion into the home, and is said to be wilful. The home is at peace when all wills are one. The universe is at peace when all wills are in harmony with the divine will. When man arrays himself against that one holy and beneficent will, as revealed in the word of God, in the law of his being and in his own conscience, he brings rebellion and disorder into the universe and into his own soul. That is self-will opposed to the divine will.

Need I say, then, that if Christ is to increase, self-

will must decrease? The very essence of religion is submission, the simple submission of the heart and will to Christ. It exalts the will of Jesus to the throne. It acknowledges him as Lord and Master. All sin resolves itself into this one defiant declaration, "We will not have this man to reign over us." There can be no religion, there can be no peace or hope, until the will is broken and subdued. Is it an easy thing? All men have not equal strength of will. With some how difficult, how prolonged is the struggle, before the unbending, iron will is brought to yield, saying, "I submit to thee, O, will divine," and sweet peace reigns in the soul! And yet, until a man is brought to that place he cannot truly be said to be Christ's. We certainly ought not to think ourselves to be his, unless we put his will first, and make ours subordinate. Christ said, if any man will be my disciple, let him take up his cross. And the first thing to be crucified on that cross is self-will. When we have given up our opposition to God and duty and the voice of conscience, when we have bowed submissively as a little child, heart-broken and will-broken, then we are his.

But even when we think we have surrendered our will to Christ, how much of self-will sometimes still remains? We seem determined to have our way, rather than walk in God's way. We are apt to mistake self-will for principle, when it is nothing in the world

but self-will. There is no more difficult man to get along with than the one who is conscientiously wilful. And it is this self-will that makes us unwilling to obey the commands of Christ, and unsubmissive to the appointments of God's providence. Oh, when will this proud *I* of self-will disappear in us all, and the will of Christ be allowed to reign supreme in our acquiescent and obedient spirits? If I am his, "he must increase, but I must decrease."

"My Jesus, as thou wilt !
Oh, may thy will be mine !
Into thy hand of love
I would my all resign ;
Through sorrow or through joy,
Conduct me as thine own,
And help me still to say,
My Lord, thy will be done !

"My Jesus, as thou wilt !
All shall be well with me ;
Each changing future scene
I gladly trust with thee.
Straight to my home above
I travel calmly on,
And sing in life or death,
My Lord, thy will be done !"

Again, this unholy self, which will decrease more and more before the increase of Christ in the soul, appears

in the form of *self-righteousness*. As self-will indicates a man's attitude towards God, self-righteousness indicates a man's estimate of himself. By self-righteousness I do not mean a desire for holiness of character and life, an effort to overcome the evil tendencies of the heart, a determination to live honestly and uprightly. All this is commendable in the sight of God and man, and ought not to grow weaker, but to grow stronger, and to increase in a man until he dies. Woe to the man whose whole life is not a prolonged and vigorous struggle to be holier and better ! But by self-righteousness I mean that boastful satisfaction in the sufficient goodness of one's own character, which is so common, which makes a man look upon himself as possessing superior moral attainments, and which blinds his eyes to his imperfections and sins, and above all to the offered grace of Christ, which alone brings salvation. Human nature has in it a Pharisaic element. There is a germ of the Pharisee in every soul. To justify one's self, to exalt one's self, to be comfortably satisfied with one's self, is as natural as it is to breathe. And it is this feeling, which is so common, so universal, that often blocks the soul's way to repentance and the acceptance of Christ as a needed Saviour. The soul may be so full of self that it has absolutely no room for Christ, and preaching is often trying to put the gospel into hearts that have no empty corner. It is

giving bread to the full, and sending a physician to men who think their weight and color are indications of unquestioned health.

Now, Christ came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. To the Scribes and Pharisees Jesus spoke those words which were, perhaps, the most cutting that ever fell from his lips, "publicans and harlots go into the kingdom of God before you." Those who feel themselves emptied of character, of reputation, of the proud consciousness of personal excellence, those are the ones who seek for Christ, who have room for Christ, who admit Christ into the soul. There is an obvious law of physics, that two bodies cannot occupy the same space at the same time. Self must be out if Christ is in. Self must decrease if Christ is to increase. When the soul gives up its independence, then it learns to depend on the Saviour; when it loses faith in its own righteousness, then it learns to build on the blood and righteousness of Jesus.

"Thy cross, not mine, O Christ,
Has borne the awful load
Of sins that none could bear
But the incarnate God.
To whom, save thee, who canst alone
For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?

“Thy death, not mine, O Christ,
Has paid the ransom due;
Ten thousand deaths like mine
Would have been all too few;
To whom, save thee, who canst alone
For sin atone, Lord shall I flee?

“Thy righteousness alone
Can clothe and beautify;
I wrap it round my soul,
In this I'll live and die;
To whom, save thee, who canst alone
For sin atone, Lord, shall I flee?”

Once more, this unholy self, which must decrease more and more before the increase of Christ in the soul, appears in the form of *selfishness*. As self-will indicates a man's attitude towards God, and self-righteousness indicates a man's estimate of himself, selfishness indicates his relation towards his neighbors and fellowmen. It may be defined as a disregard of the rights and privileges of others for the sake of gratifying one's own feelings and desires. Archbishop Whately says: “Selfishness consists not in the indulging of this or that particular propensity, but in disregarding, for the sake of any kind of personal gratification or advantage, the rights or the feelings of other men. It is therefore a *negative* quality, that is, it consists in *not* considering what is due to one's neighbors,

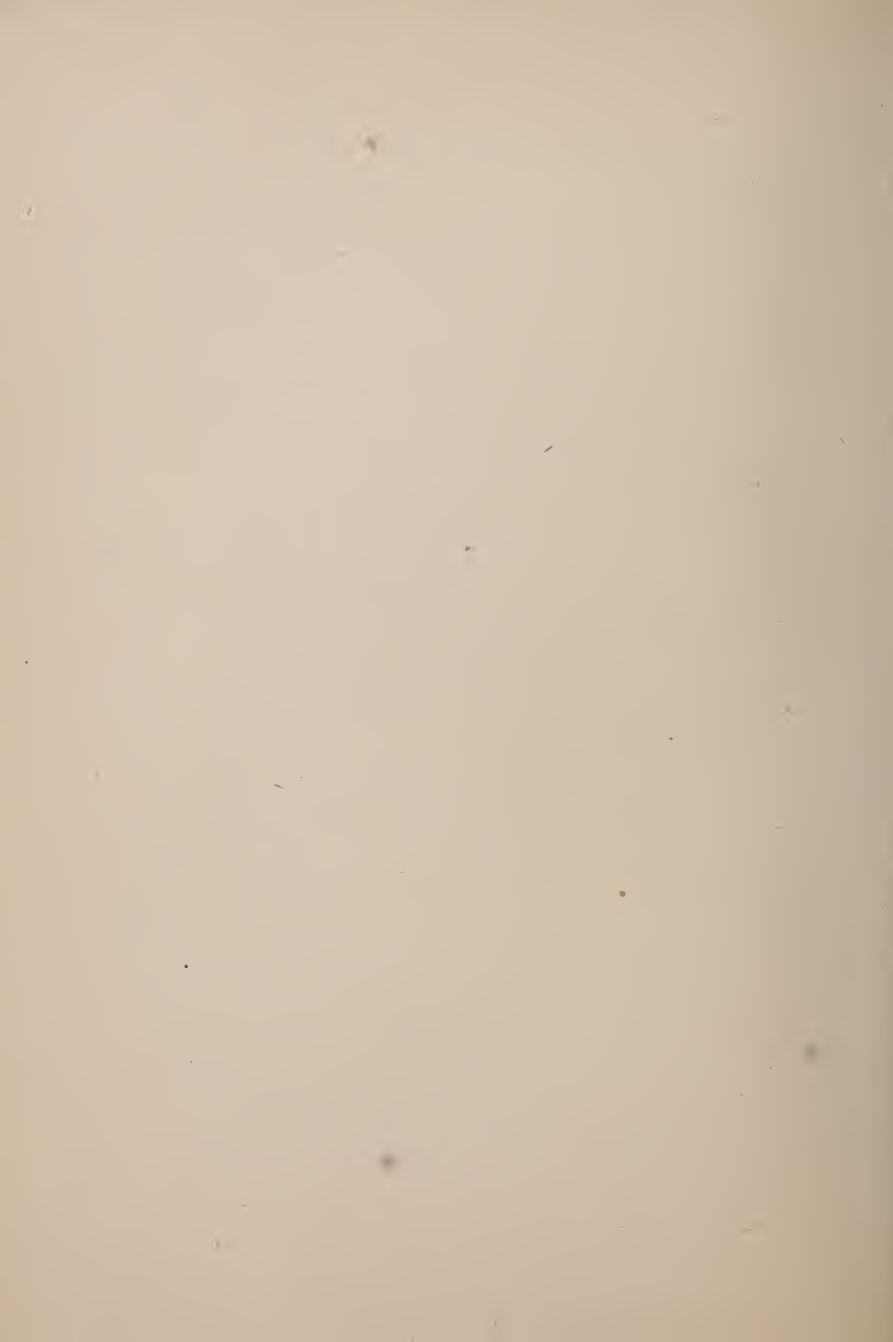
through a deficiency of justice or benevolence, and selfishness accordingly will show itself in as many different shapes as there are different dispositions in men. You may see these differences even in very young children. One selfish child, who is greedy, will seek to keep all the cakes and sweetmeats to himself; another, who is idle, will not care what trouble he causes others so he can save his own; another, who is vain, will seek to obtain the credit which is due to others; one who is covetous, will seek to gain at another's expense, etc. In short, each person has a *self* of his own. And consequently, though you may be of a character very unlike that of some selfish person, you may yet be, in your own way, quite as selfish as he."

If we regard our rights as superior to those of others, and gratify our desires to the neglect of those of others, and follow out our way and will regardless of the wishes of others, we are indulging that spirit which is in direct antagonism with the gospel, and which Christ came to exterminate in the earth. He it was who came not to do his own will, but the will of him who sent him, who ever went about doing good, and who "though he was rich, yet for our sakes became poor, that we through his poverty might be rich." When his spirit triumphs over the cursed spirit of selfishness, when it increases in the world and in the souls of men, in

your heart and mine, then will men be loving, considerate, thoughtful, denying themselves for others' comfort and happiness, finding their joy in the joy of a helpful and loving ministry. He must increase, but we, the selfish we, must decrease.

Here then we have this trinity of evils, self-will, self-righteousness, and selfishness, which are the sum and substance of all sin; and over against them is that trinity of Christian graces and excellences, faith, hope, and charity, a submissive faith in the one supreme will of the universe, hope in the blood and righteousness of Jesus Christ, and charity which "suffereth long and is kind, envieth not, vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil." Those shall pass away with all the unfruitful works of darkness. But these shall abide, the blessed fruits of Christ's increasing triumph in the world.





VI. HONEST DOUBT.

VI.

HONEST DOUBT.

Nicodemus was a timid, but evidently an honest inquirer after truth. He had not yet the courage which comes from conviction, yet his mind was in a healthy ferment. He was restless, dissatisfied with the old paths, longing for new light, yet not fully prepared to accept Christ's teachings and follow him, questioning where he could not understand, and failing to understand because of the blinding unbelief which still lingered in his heart. His whole conduct and manner disclose a mind troubled, perplexed, unwilling to believe, unless it can know the "how" and the "why," asking "how can a man be born when he is old?" and persistently inquiring, "how can these things be?" and yet candid and honest—honest with itself, and desirous to be honest with the truth. The unbelief of Nicodemus was vastly different from that dishonest skepticism which is ever false to hidden conviction, and vastly different from that flippant unbelief which has never inquired after truth, and yet thinks it knows everything. Nicodemus was sincere in coming to Christ, and, although he doubted before he came, and doubted after he came, yet he was serious and earnest

and candid. He may be held up with Thomas as an illustration of honest doubt.

There is such a thing as *honest* doubt. We are wont to use the terms "skeptic" and "skepticism" always as terms of reproach, and sometimes, perhaps, speak of them in words of too severe condemnation. All skepticism does not possess the same spirit. There is infidelity which is hostile, bitter, irreverent and unreasonable. It not only will not be convinced, but it will not listen and inquire calmly and candidly. It closes its ears with obstinate prejudices, and opens its mouth in conceited derision. Such infidelity can hardly be denounced too severely, for it is most unfair and unrighteous. But there is unbelief which is only one stage in the process of inquiry. While frankly confessing its doubts, it is willing to weigh and consider; it investigates reverently; it seeks for further evidence and additional light; it longs to know what is truth, and holds itself in readiness to accept it. It reveals the unrest of the heart, and is undoubtedly attended with danger, as everything short of full faith in Christ must be; and yet it may be a stepping stone to the saving faith of the gospel.

Thomas is called doubting or unbelieving Thomas, not because he was bitterly opposed to the fact of Christ's resurrection, but because, it may be, by his very constitution of mind, he needed more evidence

than others in order to be convinced. Some men seem to be constitutionally more incredulous and skeptical than others. Thomas said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Jesus did not denounce him for his unbelief, but condescendingly and lovingly accorded to him the very evidence which he demanded. The result proved the wisdom of Christ's course, and that Thomas was an *honest* skeptic, and wanted only to discover and be convinced of the truth. For when the evidence was presented in the pierced hands and side of the risen Christ, the disciple's unbelief was gone, and he gave his heart anew to Christ in loving and adoring faith, confessing, "My Lord, and my God." We shall do well to learn the lesson, and treat honest doubt as gently and patiently as did Christ himself, that we may lead it on to a sincere and saving faith.

In like manner, Nicodemus may be regarded as thoroughly honest. His inquiry, "How can these things be?" was the deliberate, thoughtful inquiry of a mind that was not opposed to conviction, but longed to have a deeper insight into spiritual things, and to comprehend the philosophy of Christian truth. His unbelief was unreasonable, as Christ faithfully showed him; and yet, in due time, it passed over into the

genuine faith of full discipleship. We find him subsequently defending Christ before the Pharisees, and at last showing his reverent attachment for him by bringing a hundred pound weight of myrrh and aloes, a costly offering for his dead body. In both instances the sacred writer is careful to tell us that it was the same Nicodemus who came to Jesus by night.

There are, undoubtedly, to-day honest doubters in our communities and congregations. They are familiar with the great truths of the Christian faith, but have never been brought to accept them. They do not obstinately refuse to listen to the claims of the Lord Jesus Christ; they do not intend to be unreasonable; in their better moments they wish they could know the truth and find rest in it, for the most unrestful thing in this world is unbelief.

There is but one remedy for honest doubt. There is but one place for it to carry its inquiries, viz., to Christ. All doubters should be followers of Nicodemus. His restless heart did not seek to find the answers to its inquiries within itself. Much less did he go to the Pharisees who were the enemies of Christ. But he went directly to him. He sought out him who alone could relieve his doubts and remove his difficulties. This was the only proper and reasonable thing for him to do. I am aware that many men, when they are trou-

bled with religious doubts, think that they can work out of them themselves by their own unaided wisdom ; or, what is worse, they take counsel with those who are more skeptical than themselves, the avowed enemies of Christ, surrounding themselves with infidel books and publications to the neglect of Christ and his Word. It takes no prophet to foretell the end of such a course, and no man can honestly say that that is being just to Christ or just to the soul.

Christ has some rights in this matter. He has a right to be heard, a right which every man has, innocent or guilty. It is too bad to be compelled to plead with men to grant to the Son of God, the divine Saviour of the world, that which they feel in honor bound to grant to the most debased criminal.

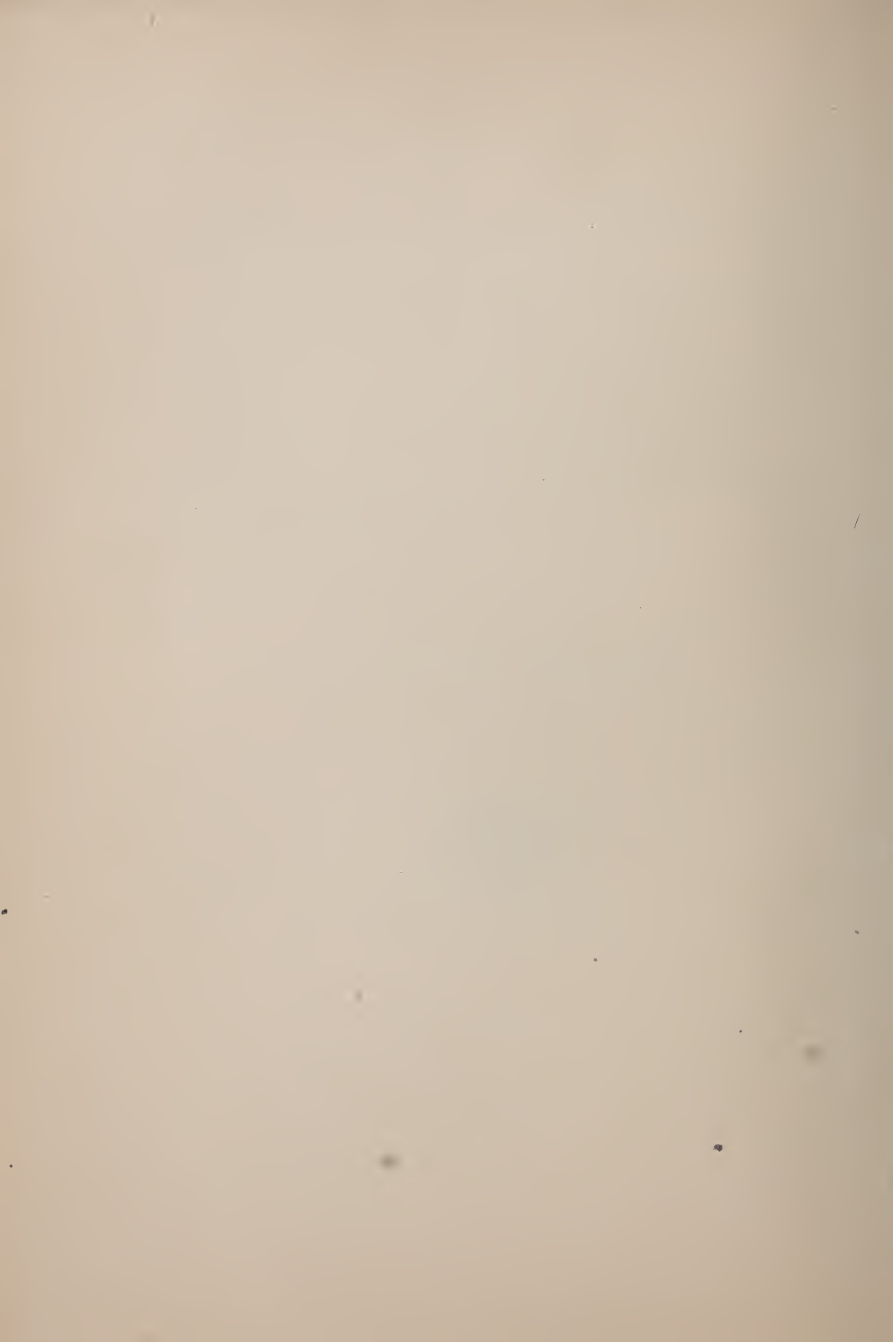
If you, my dear reader, have any doubts about Christ, his truth or his personal claims upon your faith as your only Saviour, the only just and honorable thing to be done is to go directly to him, as Nicodemus went. It is better to go to him in the dark than not at all, in secret, without the knowledge of any earthly friend, if you dare not go openly. But I beseech you, do not fail to go to him, and into his gentle, patient and loving ear pour all your doubts and perplexities, being assured that he will meet you in the fulness of his power and grace, and give you light for darkness, peace for unrest,

certainty for doubt, and the blessed possession of a joyous hope for all your anxious fears.

Tholuck, the eminent interpreter and simple-hearted Christian, once said of his conversion: "The thought of salvation through Christ was at that time a strange one to me; it was poetical, that was my first thought; it was beautiful; at last I recognized it as divine; and my soul, torn by the struggles of philosophy, found peace in Jesus."



VII. THE OPEN DOOR.



VII.

THE OPEN DOOR.

THE REWARD OF FIDELITY.

A single verse in Christ's message to the church in Philadelphia, that ancient "city of brotherly love" (Rev. iii. 8), contains a very important principle of action in Christ's dealings with his people. The verse reads as follows: "Behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it; for thou hast little strength [not *a* little strength, for that would have been an acknowledgement of more strength than the church had], and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name." Christian fidelity shall not go unrewarded. Christ's commendation is something better than words.

In the subsequent verses of this message Christ said to this faithful church, that she should receive honor from an unbelieving world. Men should come and worship at her feet, and know that Christ had loved her. Because she had kept the word of his patience, he also would keep her from the hour of temptation. The faithful should receive the divine favor. Whoever kept Christ's word, Christ would keep him. This prophecy was proved true. Even the infidel historian, Gibbon, was compelled to acknowledge it in a remark-

able passage, which reads thus : "In the loss of Ephesus the Christians deplored the fall of the first angel, the extinction of the first candlestick of the Revelation ; the desolation is complete ; and the temple of Diana or the church of Mary will equally elude the search of the curious traveler. The circus and three stately theatres of Laodicea are now peopled with wolves and foxes ; Sardis is reduced to a miserable village ; the God of Mahomet, without a rival or a son, is invoked in the mosques of Thyatira and Pergamus ; and the populousness of Smyrna is supported by the foreign trade of the Franks and Armenians. Philadelphia alone has been saved by prophecy, or courage. At a distance from the sea, forgotten by the emperors, encompassed on all sides by the Turks, her valiant citizens defended their religion and freedom above four-score years, and at length capitulated with the proudest of Ottomans. Among the Greek colonies and churches of Asia, Philadelphia is still erect — a column in a scene of ruins — a pleasing example that the paths of honor and safety may sometimes be the same."

But the eighth verse sets forth the peculiar reward of fidelity and the manner in which Christ deals with his faithful ones. The "open door" is undoubtedly a door opening out into a larger field of service and usefulness, a fresh and wider opportunity to preach the

word which they had kept, and proclaim the saving name which they had not denied. Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord." And again he wrote: "A great and effectual door is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries." Because the Philadelphian Christians had kept Christ's word and honored his name, Christ proposed to honor and reward them — how? by giving them his thanks and permitting them to rest from their labors? No, no. That is not Christ's method of compensating his laborers. But it was rather by giving them increased opportunities to serve him. This is the great lesson which Christ teaches us, that in his kingdom the reward of fidelity is the opportunity for larger service for him. Have we thought of it? Have we learned the lesson? Do we welcome it to-day? This is the way in which Christ rewards the faithful — if we serve him faithfully to-day, he will reward us by permitting us to serve him more to-morrow; if we are faithful in the little field which we now occupy, he will give us an open door to a larger and a grander service; if we use our one talent well, he will make it two talents that we may give him the more honor.

I am aware that this is not the way in which even good Christian men usually reason. They are quite

apt to say—I have had my share of labor, and service, and giving; I think I have done and borne my part; and now let some one else take the oars, while I take a little rest in compensation for what I have done; I think I have earned a little cessation from labor and a little let up from so many calls. But Christ says: “My dear, faithful disciple, because thou hast been so faithful, and hast done so much and so well, I am going to honor thee by giving thee an open door, and inviting thee to a larger service, and asking thee to do more for me.” This is the principle Christ works on, and this is the way he looks at it.

For we must remember how universally true it is that fidelity in one sphere fits for a larger and a higher sphere. The child at school, who is faithful in the lower grades, is prepared to advance to higher and more interesting studies. The clerk in the store by his fidelity becomes qualified for more important and responsible trusts. The mechanic who serves well his apprenticeship is prepared to be a master workman. The youthful minister of Christ who devotes himself completely and conscientiously to the demands of his little parish, becomes fitted to enter a larger field and bear heavier burdens. Men rise as they are fitted to rise. The subordinate officer who shows his valor and skill in commanding a single company, prepares himself to take charge of a regiment or a brigade. It is

the smaller and humbler service well performed that fits for those larger duties and spheres of activity, which lie before us in life. It is so in Christ's service. He who is faithful in the trusts and duties of to-day becomes qualified for the higher duties and nobler trusts of to-morrow. Christ puts *disciplined men* in the front ranks and on the high places of the field.

Moreover, it is fidelity that earns promotion. It not only fits a man for a higher place, but it makes him worthy of it. The clerk who neglects his tasks, because he feels himself above his position, is not likely to get above it. Preferment follows merit. The captain who proves himself valiant and competent to command, is brevetted. Unfaithfulness, disobedience, neglect, never lie in the line of promotion. Man rewards fidelity, and so does God. "Because thou hast been faithful over a few things," said Christ, "I will make thee ruler over many things." "Because thou hast kept my word and hast not denied my name, behold I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it." I have given thee a greater honor, an enlarged field, a grander opportunity, and no man can deprive thee of it. He that is faithful in a little will have the opportunity to be faithful in much.

And oh, my brother, what if the open door, which is the reward of fidelity, be the door of heaven! And what if the question whether that door, that entrance

into life, that gate of pearl, shall be open or shut to us at last, depends upon whether we are now keeping his word and not denying his name ! When I read the Master's solemn words about the unfaithful virgins standing and knocking at the shut door and finding no admittance to the joys of the feast ; and when I hear him saying to the faithful servant, as if so much had depended on his fidelity, " Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things ; I will make thee ruler over many things ; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord," my thoughts are carried forward irresistibly to the feast and the joy of heaven. I know that salvation is of grace, that it is not by works of righteousness which we have done, but by his mercy that he saves us. I love to join with you in the penitential hymn,

" I know I am weak and sinful,

It comes to me more and more ;

But when the dear Saviour shall bid me come in,

I'll enter the open door."

But whom will he bid to enter there, if it be not those who keep his word and do not deny his name ? And what other evidence have we that we are his, and have right to the tree of life, except that we do so keep his word, both of faith and commandment, and do not deny his name, being kept faithful by his almighty

grace? God forbid that we should limit his free, sovereign grace. God forbid that we should pervert his free grace into an occasion of unfaithfulness and disobedience.

Let every servant of Christ, then, occupy faithfully the place where he now is, and do well the duty of the hour, that he may be fitted for some larger service and some higher duty, and may be worthy of it. Is any one saying, in deep humility of spirit or in grateful desire—

“I long to serve thee more ;
Reveal an open door,
Saviour, to me :
Then counting all but loss,
I'll glory in the cross,
And follow thee.”

Remember that the door to new service is not open to the inactive and the unfaithful, but to the hands that are busy, the hearts that are full of zeal, and the feet that are running in the way of God's commandments. Be faithful ; keep Christ's word ; do not deny his name, either by an un-Christian faith or an un-Christian life, that your divine Master may own and reward you graciously.

Moreover, fail not to look upon every open door, every fresh opportunity to serve Christ as a new privi-

lege and honor which he confers upon you, and which is to be both the reward and the test of your fidelity. Count it your peculiar joy that you may honor with all your powers, and all your hours, and all your substance, him who suffered shame for you. Earth has no sweeter voice than the call of duty. Earth has no higher glory than the service of Christ. Blessed is the man, not whose work is done and whose hands are folded, but who has something more to do for Christ, whose past faithfulness in service Christ still rewards by new opportunities. Turn not away from any open door, for it is Christ's token of approval, and may be the very gate of heaven to your willing feet. Indeed, methinks that heaven would cease to be heaven, if there was no offering of service to Jesus there. Be faithful, then, to the present ; this, this is the open door which God has set before you. As sings the Quaker poet—

“The present, the present is all thou hast
For thy sure possessing ;
Like the patriarch's angel, hold it fast
Till it gives its blessing.

“Peopling the shadows, we turn from him
And from one another ;
All is spectral, and vague, and dim
Save God and our brother.

“O restless spirit ! wherefore strain
Beyond thy sphere ;
Heaven and hell, with their joy and pain,
Are now and here.

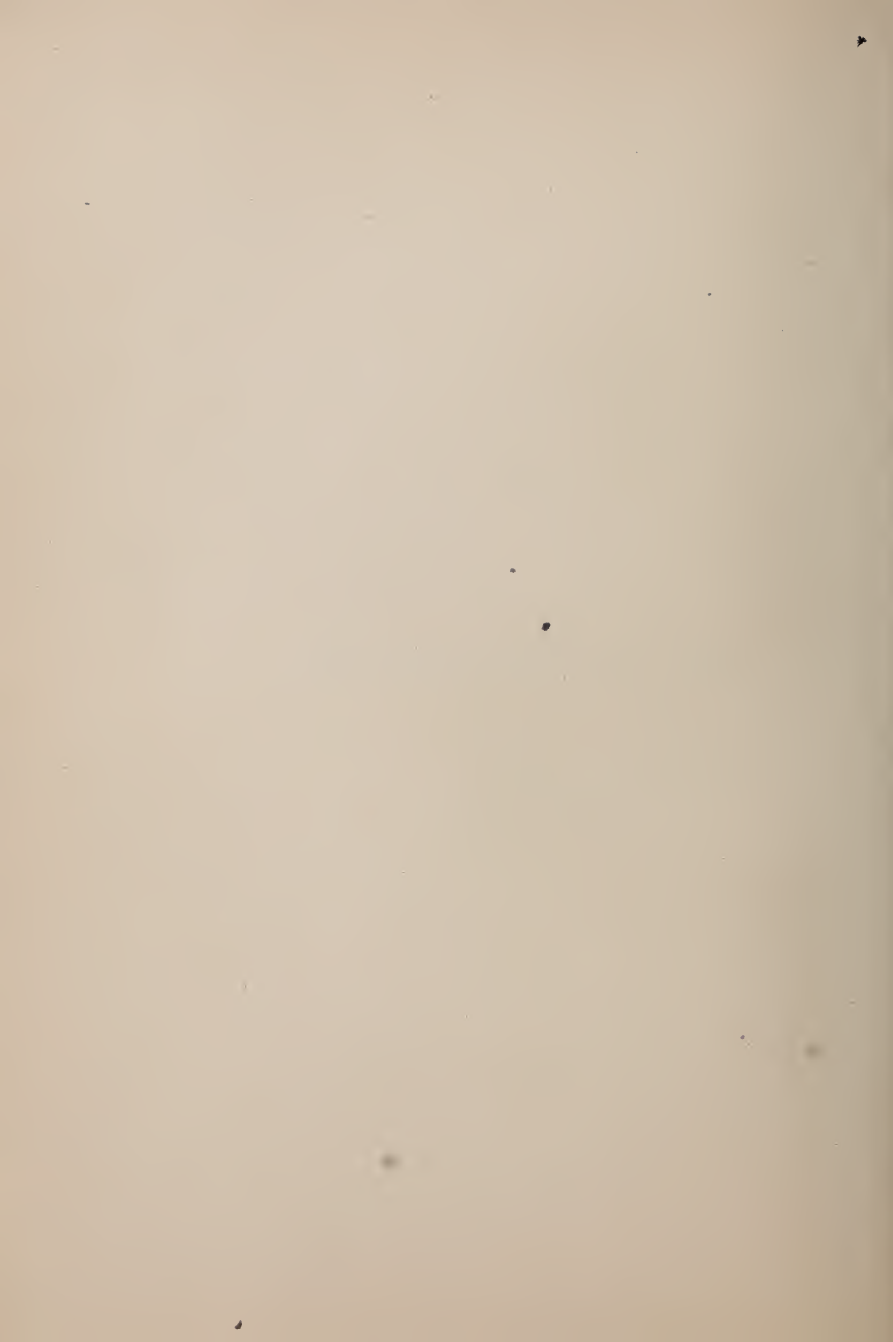
“Back to thyself is measured well
All thou hast given ;
Thy neighbor's wrong is thy present hell,
His bliss thy heaven.

‘Leaning on God, make with reverent meekness
His own thy will,
And with strength from him shall thy utter weakness
Life's task fulfil.”





VIII. CHRISTIAN SOBERNESS.



VIII.

CHRISTIAN SOBERNESS

There is this peculiarity about Christian soberness, viz., it is so thoroughly in earnest that it is a species of intoxication. We say that a man is "sober" when he has not been drinking, when he is free from the influence of intoxicating spirits. God says we are sober when we have been drinking so much of his spirit and truth that we are completely under their influence.

Christian earnestness and zeal have always been liable to the charge of an insane folly and intoxication. The friends of Christ went out to lay hold of him, for they said, "He is beside himself." The disciples on the day of Pentecost were accused of being filled with new wine. Festus told Paul that he was mad. The apostle confessed to the Corinthians, as if his conduct needed an explanation, "Whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God." And to the Christians at Ephesus he wrote, "Be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess, but be filled with the Spirit." Feel that other kind of intoxication, that holy and joyous exhilaration of God's Spirit, which, instead of bewildering the faculties, quickens them; instead of sending a blush of shame to the face, puts upon it a look of manliness and

humble courage; instead of giving a stammering tongue, loosens it to speak forth the praise and the truth of God; and, instead of giving the pitiful staggering of uncertain feet, gives the firm step in the path of duty, in the service of Christ, in deeds of charity and saving love. There is no excess in such intoxication as that.

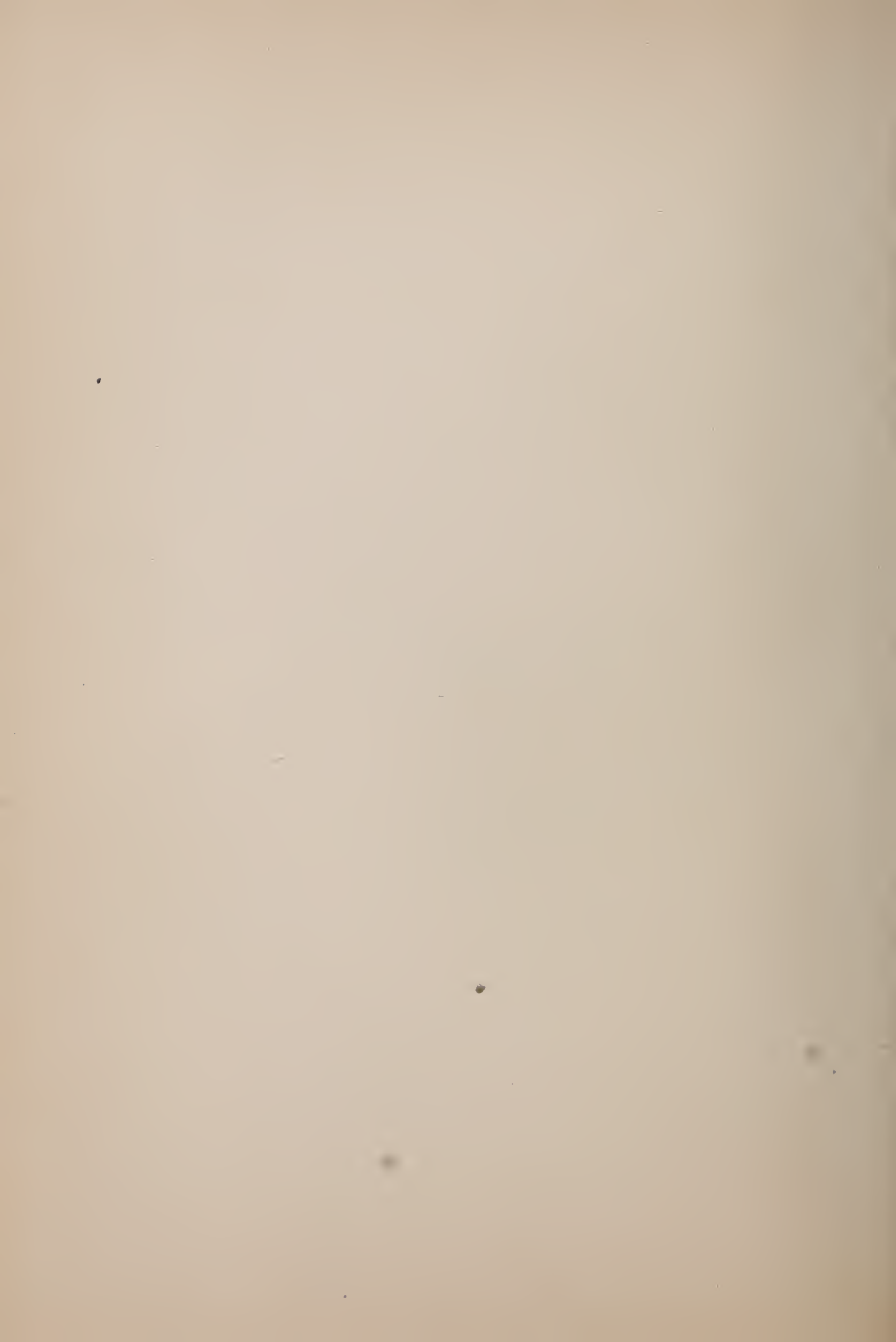
The excessive moderation and soberness, as it is falsely called, which is so prevalent among men, even among Christian men, which looks coldly upon strong religious conviction and suspiciously upon revival influences, which thinks it unmanly to weep over one's sins and to cry aloud to God for forgiveness, which would put respectability for excitement, and a lifeless inactivity for zeal, is entirely contrary to the spirit and truth of Christ — nay, more, is born of irreligion and the father of lies.

Oh, for more of that true, intense gospel soberness, which makes the sinner feel that he is lost, and leads him to cry out, "What must I do to be saved?" which makes him not only think about religion, but makes him earnest at the throne of grace as he pleads for mercy; which excites him with a deep penitence for his sins, and the unutterable joy of forgiveness and the unutterable preciousness of Christ; which burns up all indifference and fatal insensibility about the great truths of God and the spiritual needs of

men, and which fires the breast with a divine passion and hurries it on errands of mercy and salvation ! Oh, for more of that Christian soberness, that commendable madness, that spiritual intoxication, which will make us all, like the great apostle, beside ourselves to God and to souls !



IX. RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND
ITS ABUSES.



IX.

RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND ITS ABUSES.

Religious liberty is the organic law of the nation. The first amendment to the Constitution of the United States, which was secured by the earnest appeal of a committee of Virginia Baptists, and adopted in 1789, reads as follows: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof, etc.;" that is, there shall be no state church established and supported by the government on the one hand, and on the other hand there shall be no legislation adverse to any form of religion which the people or the individual citizen may elect.

It is sometimes said that our nation is a Christian nation, that Christianity was the atmosphere in which our free government was born and cradled, that the principles of revealed religion lie at its foundation, that our common law has its basis in the law of God. This is true. It could hardly have been otherwise. Ours is a Christian civilization; the founders of our Republic, in their views, their principles and their character, were the product of the seed-sowing of these Christian centuries. To have modelled the government after any other pattern, to have infused into it any other than

Christian principles, would have been to turn back the dial of history, and to be blind to all the light and wisdom which had come to the Christian generations.

Yet, under a free government, religion must be left to the voluntary choice of the people. There can be no legislation for the consciences of men. Whether a man shall choose one form of religion or another, or no form of religion, whether he shall be a believer or an infidel, a Protestant or a Catholic, a Christian or a Pagan, must be left to the individual conscience; the government must not influence or interfere. It must grant to all the liberty of free and untrammelled choice, and protect all in the exercise of that conscientious choice, reserving to itself, simply but always, the right to protect itself against any form of treason or immorality under the cloak of religion.

If, for instance, the Jesuits, who have plotted against almost every European government, and been expelled by them all, should seek to undermine our government and destroy its free institutions, it would be the duty of the government to suppress them — not as Jesuits, but as traitors to the country of their adoption. Nothing is more obvious than that the practices of the Mormons are antagonistic to the first principles of morality and social order, and nothing is more discreditable to an enlightened government in this enlightened age than that this foul ulcer, under the sacred name of religion,

is allowed to remain on the body politic. Religious liberty cannot mean liberty to indulge in gross immorality or to organize treason, by which the fair name of the nation is smirched, or its very existence threatened. Whatever is worthy of the holy name of religion, and the adherents of it, should be tolerated and protected, but not the followers of Satan, though clothed in the stolen livery of heaven. All forms of religion, therefore, which do not antagonize the purity and life of free government, are to have an equal chance under it. That is religious liberty.

For many years our Baptist fathers in this country were not permitted to enjoy the liberty of their holy faith. Though acknowledged to be pure in life, and intensely loyal and patriotic in their affections, they were unrighteously taxed for the support of a worship which they could not attend. They were fined, imprisoned, and whipped for the simple offence of worshipping God as their conscience required. But in all their history and sufferings, it has been honorably true of them that they have cheerfully granted to others the rights and liberties which they have claimed for themselves; viz.: absolute uncontrol and freedom of conscience in all matters of religious faith and practice. No Baptist hand has ever been raised against the soul-freedom of any human being.

But how else has religious liberty been abused? Freedom of faith in matters of religion, the absence

of any *human* restraint, has been sometimes interpreted to mean freedom from all restraint, license to disbelieve everything or to believe nothing. Since the government can prescribe no creed, and no human being or organization has any right to determine our faith, some have supposed that there are no prescriptions or limitations fixed by God, or revelation, or the moral nature of man, that religious liberty is liberty to have no religion, and that to be religiously free is to be free from all religion. So it happens that the most pronounced heretics and unbelievers delight to call themselves "free-thinkers," and religion, when it has emptied itself of all faith and substance and spiritual power, is called, "free religion." Independence of thought and belief are supposed by some persons to be secured only by breaking away from the established faith of the centuries, and men who are very much afraid lest they shall be enslaved by somebody's else truth, are taken captive foolishly by somebody's else heresy, and call it freedom.

It is sometimes regarded as evidence of growth, mental expansion and breadth, intellectual independence, to deny the great central truths of the gospel which have stood the test and been the basis of saving faith, for well-nigh three-score generations, as if religion were a matter of development and change (one generation outgrowing the faith of the preceding), and not

something which rests on the eternal verities of God. Doubt and skepticism attack the young to-day very much like children's diseases. Most persons outgrow them, and are not permanently affected ; but with some, the painful and fatal *sequelæ* remain as long as they live.

There can be no greater absurdity than to suppose that independence of thought is incompatible with orthodoxy of belief, that to be an independent thinker a man must be a "free thinker," and that to show one's freedom of belief a man must fall into the slavery of some exploded heresy. He who is free to believe is as free as he who is free to doubt, and a man may investigate carefully, may weigh independently, may question freely in matters of religious faith, and at length come, in the very exercise of his freedom, to the same conclusions which the greatest minds in all these Christian centuries have in like manner reached. He who settles down upon any of the accepted truths of religion, as of history or science, may do it independently and in the manly use of his powers of reason, and may thereby show not his folly or dependence, but his superior wisdom. He who believes an error or a falsehood, when the truth is discoverable, is abusing the liberty with which God has endowed him, and may, in so doing, be sacrificing his boasted independence ; for faith should always be bounded by the limitations of truth.

X. SPIRITUAL LIBERTY.



X.

SPIRITUAL LIBERTY.

There is no subject more interesting than that of personal freedom as related to moral conduct. Am I free to do wrong? Am I free to go contrary to my moral convictions or the moral precepts of the Word of God? In one sense, yes. That is, I have the power to do it. But in another sense, no. My liberty is not absolute, but is restricted by my moral nature, by the rights of others, and by the moral teachings of Christ.

And just here is a fatal fallacy into which men are forever falling. To some men liberty means the removal of all restraint, freedom to indulge any appetite or desire or sinful passion; and anything short of this is bondage. But God's Word teaches exactly the opposite. He who uses what he calls his freedom to indulge in sin, has thereby forfeited his freedom, and become the slave of sin. He has sold himself into Egypt and put himself under the hardest of task-masters. "Know ye not," said Paul, "that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey, whether of sin unto death or of obedience unto righteousness?" There is but one testimony in the Word of God. Cross-question it as you will, and

you get but a single answer. A life of sin, instead of being a life of freedom, is a life of ignoble and debasing servitude. Sin reigns with a tyrant's power unmercifully in the soul, bringing into subjection the soul's noblest faculties, laying upon its back its stinging lashes, keeping it in ignorance of the elevating truths of God and his love, sometimes crushing out all hope and aspirations after a higher and a better life, and paying at last as its wages for all service rendered and all shame and remorse incurred, death, and nothing but death.

And this same divine revelation calls Christ "Saviour" and "Redeemer," who came to "preach deliverance to the captives, the recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised," whose limbs are chafed and wounded by the chains which are on them. It tells of a liberty that is moral and spiritual, of an escape from the power of Satan and the bondage of evil, of affections that are set free, of hopes that are uncaged and fly heavenward, of hands and feet that are unshackled, of immortal spirits that are redeemed and brought into the glorious liberty of the Son of God. More vital than civil liberty, great as is that blessing, and more important than religious liberty, and often enjoyed when that is denied, is this spiritual liberty, this true liberty of soul which Christ confers, which emancipates the whole nature of man

from the dominion and curse of sin, and crowns it with the likeness and fellowship of the Son of God. "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."

Yet this new, this higher liberty is not absolute in the sense of being without restraint or law or commandment. The Christian is no lawless antinomian, by a careless and reckless life left to bring disgrace upon the holy religion which he professes to accept. He bows to the authority of the pure precepts of the Gospel, and acknowledges the supremacy of the one perfect, sinless example in Christ. He expects by the consistency and spirituality of his life to prove to the world the sincerity of his profession and the genuineness of his hope. Paul did, indeed, say to Christians, "ye are not under law, but under grace." But by "law" he meant not the holy precepts of the gospel, but the ceremonial and legal system as a method of salvation. We are not under that. We are not dependent for our hope of heaven upon the perfection of an imperfect righteousness, but hope to be saved by the infinite grace of God, which flows to us through our perfect and crucified Redeemer — "not under law, but under grace," not under the legal system, but under the Christian system, not saved *by* dead works, but *from* dead works, not under law to sin, but under law to Christ, free indeed to obey the God whom

we love, and to engage in the holy service which is our supreme delight ; “as free,” says Peter, “and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants (or the bond-servants) of God.” Servants still ! but under a new and blessed Master whom we have voluntarily chosen, with his yoke, which is easy, upon our willing necks, and his commandments, which are not grievous, written upon our loving and obedient hearts.

This, then, is the conclusion of the whole matter, viz., that the highest liberty is found in a life of cheerful service under law to Christ. We live in a world that is under the reign of law, of law which has its seat in the bosom of God. The harmony of the universe depends upon the obedience of the universe. The drop of rain that falls from the clouds and buries itself at the root of a flower, the flower that drinks the moisture at its thirsty roots and converts it into beauty and fragrance, the star that moves noiselessly in its wonted orbit, uninterrupted and harmless, and drops its little light upon us as it moves, the comet that comes a strange and unexpected visitor in our heavens, and attracts to itself the wondering gaze of the learned and the unlearned, all act in uniform, unresisting obedience to divine law, which is but the expression of that supreme will that gives to the earth its fruitfulness and holds the planets in their courses.

Christ is both Redeemer and Law-giver of the soul. He gave himself for our ransom, that he might redeem us from the power and penalty of our transgressions. And now he gives to us his wisdom, his Spirit and his grace to be the law and inspiration of our lives, that ever yielding to the touch of his will, and moving in the orbit of his love, we may be harmonized with the great God above us, and know the freedom which comes from glad obedience, the liberty which for man is found only in cheerful service to him who made him.



XI. A LETTER TO A STUDENT.

XI.

A LETTER TO A STUDENT.

My Dear Friend :—I was glad to have our brief conversation yesterday, and was only sorry that it could not be longer, so that I could have learned more fully the state of your mind as to religious things. One remark which you made led me to wish to say a few words more, which I am sure you will receive in the same kind spirit in which they are written, for I have only the kindest personal regard for you and desire for your highest good. The remark you made was in reply to my quotation of Christ's words, "seek ye first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6: 33). You appeared to throw discredit upon the authority and wisdom of Christ's words, and said in substance that "it was a vast field of discussion, and one so young as yourself could not be expected to have any settled convictions upon such things."

I sincerely hope that I misunderstood you, for I cannot believe that your studies have led you away from him who is acknowledged by all to be the greatest Teacher of moral and religious truth that the world has ever known, and who by common consent "spake as never man spake." I can conceive that your absorbing interest in your studies and the associations

of college life may have caused your heart to grow cold in religious things ; but I cannot believe that you have allowed your studies to unsettle your faith in him whose words have commanded the respect and admiration of the greatest minds known to history, have given birth to the highest thinking and the noblest living, have brought comfort and light and hope to men in the darkest experiences in life, have purified and elevated human character and society, and, in a word, have been the chief source of what we call our modern civilization. Whatever other things may be in doubt, about these things there is and can be no question.

I am aware that the whole field of religious discussion is a broad one. But the main points which enter into Christian faith and experience are not numerous, and are within the reach of all willing minds. For God's word was designed for us all, for the race, and not simply for the maturest and most highly educated. It is still true, as Christ said, that "whosoever will do his will shall know of the doctrine." Because therefore some may rashly doubt, it cannot relieve us in the least of the responsibility of having settled convictions about those greatest of all truths, truths that pertain to our soul's present and eternal well-being.

But I fear that young men sometimes deceive themselves when they offer as an excuse for an unsettled faith "the broadness of the field of discussion." The

true reason may be, after all, not the humble consciousness of inability and immaturity, but one which they would hardly dare to confess to themselves, viz., a proud superiority to the gospel of Christ, as if they had outgrown that system of revealed truth, which offers to man the only basis of true morality and of immortal hope, and contains in itself the proofs of its permanence and universality. Of course I do not believe that you have come to any such false and conceited estimate of yourself, and yet there is a danger against which you will allow me earnestly to warn you, that while thinking yourself to be unsettled in faith, simply holding your mind in equipoise, your opinions may be already settling in the wrong direction. And it must be remembered that it is true of unbelief, as Plato said of atheism, "it is a disease of the soul before it becomes an error of the understanding."

Paul, who was the Bacon of his time, congratulated Timothy, that from a child he had known the Holy Scriptures, which were able to make him wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. Such has been your inestimable privilege. It may not indeed prove that a religious faith is true, because it is held by one's father and mother. But that fact ought to secure for it a most candid and filial consideration, and we ought, before we discard it, to be sure that we have found something better, something that will do more

and better for us than their faith has done for them. If their faith has brought to them the holiest joy and satisfaction, strength in weakness, light in darkness, solace in sorrow, and the blessed assurance of immortal life, is unbelief likely to do more for us than that? The difficulty with unbelief is that it is un-belief. It takes away the soul's foundation, and leaves it nothing on which to rest.

May you seek and possess that wisdom which is from above, and come to those firm convictions which are in harmony with the demands of our higher nature and with the plain teachings of the Word of God. May you be saved from making shipwreck of faith; and may your cultivated powers be consecrated to the noblest service in which man can engage, the service of Jesus Christ.

Being confident that you will, as an intelligent man, give to these things the candid and honest consideration which they deserve, and that, if you do, your decision will be such as will bring strength and peace to your own life, and joy to the hearts of those who love and pray for you, I remain,

YOUR SINCERE FRIEND.

XII. CHRIST OUR PASCHAL LAMB.

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CHRIST OUR PASCHAL LAMB.

We wish to present some of the reasons which make it not only highly probable, but absolutely certain, that the ancient Jewish passover was typical of the sacrifice of Christ, and that the paschal lamb, whose body was eaten and whose blood was sprinkled upon the door-posts on that memorable night when the passover was instituted, was a type of Jesus.

When we read, in the account of the deliverance of Israel from the power of Pharaoh, of the lamb that was slain for each household, we cannot but feel that it is a matter of no little significance that Christ should be called a lamb, or emphatically, *the Lamb of God*, as if he was the lamb which God had provided, the one sufficient lamb for all the families of men. Moreover, this title of Christ is used in such connections that it cannot possibly be made to refer to his meekness and gentleness of spirit, but must have reference to the giving up of his life as of a lamb slain. He is called "the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." He is said to have been "led as a lamb to the slaughter," and to be "the lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The slaying of the lamb of

the passover, then, would seem to foreshadow the death of Jesus.

This will be still more evident when we look at the kind of lamb that was chosen for the passover offering. It was to be a lamb "without blemish." Now, it is expressly stated of Christ, when his offering up of himself is described, that he was "holy, harmless and undefiled;" and again, in the very language applied to the paschal lamb, it is said that we are redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."

But as if to leave no doubt that Jesus is to be regarded as our paschal lamb, there was a remarkable instance of the fulfilment of prophecy. Of the paschal lamb it was commanded, "neither shall ye break a bone thereof." It was not to be separated. It was to be eaten in the house. No part of it could be carried out. The skeleton was to be left entire. The reason of this undoubtedly was that "the lamb was to be the symbol of unity — the unity of the family, the unity of the nation, the unity of God with his people whom he has taken into covenant with himself." Now when Jesus was crucified, and those who were with him, the Jews besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and their death thereby hastened, because it was the preparation, and their bodies must not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath. The soldiers were commissioned

to do it. An unseen, yet important prophecy trembles lest it be violated and broken. Will Christ fulfil the conditions of the world's paschal lamb? They came to the first cross, and brake the legs of the dying man. Then they passed by the Saviour and came to the third cross, and brake the legs of him who hung thereon. But when they turned to Jesus, and saw that he was dead already, they brake *not* his legs, but thrust a spear into his side. Then it is significantly added: "For these things were done that the Scripture might be fulfilled, a bone of him shall not be broken," language which by its previous use identifies Jesus with the lamb of the passover, and his sacrifice with its death. In Paul's letter to the Corinthians we make him say in our translation, "This is my body which is *broken* for you," and these words are the ones which are usually repeated at the Lord's Supper after the breaking of the bread. But this is a mistake. The best manuscripts have no such word as "broken," and read simply, "this is my body which is for you." Christ's body was not a broken body. The broken bread represents the slain, the crucified body of the Saviour; but he was a true paschal lamb. Not a bone of him was broken. And the unbroken body of Christ becomes the symbol of that high, spiritual unity which exists between all of God's true people, of whom it is said, "Ye are one body in Christ," and which also exists between them

and God himself, a unity of which the crucified Christ is the source and centre.

Again it is worthy of note, as proving the actual relation between the passover and the death of Christ, that Christ chose this festival, of all other festivals and of all other times, as the time when he should be put to death. Nothing can be more evident than that his dying, both its time and its manner, were foreseen and calculated by him. He had power to lay down his life, and he had power to take it again. The institution of the Lord's Supper at the close of the passover meal were also deeply significant. Christ's purpose is easily perceived. He would take advantage of the hour. When the thoughts of men were engaged in the passover rites, when they were reminded of God's gracious deliverance of their fathers from the unhappy bondage of Egypt, and were offering the lamb as God had commanded them in remembrance of the old covenant, Jesus by his death, in connection with the appointed festival, would offer himself to men as the fulfilment of the olden type, *the lamb offered once for all*, and would proclaim, not simply to Jewish families and groups, but to the whole human family the possibility of a greater deliverance from a bondage worse than Egyptian. For such we must understand to be the meaning of his words, "This is the new covenant in my blood (the blood of the true paschal lamb) which

is shed for many for the remission of sins." The old covenant was that which was given in the blood of lambs, when God visited Pharaoh in terrible judgment, but faithfully preserved his people. The new covenant — what is it but that which is given in the blood of the cross to those who have sought shelter there, when God shall finally punish the sin, the hardness of heart, the unbelief of the children of men! "When I see the blood, I will pass over you" whose hearts have been sprinkled by it. And so Paul, with a firm faith in this covenant of Calvary, in this complete deliverance from the bondage and penalty of sin, a faith which we earnestly commend to all, and which all will do well to possess, exclaimed, "For even Christ our passover is crucified for us."



XIII. THE CONDITION OF FORGIVENESS.

XIII.

THE CONDITION OF FORGIVENESS.

There are some persons who seem to think that forgiveness is a sort of indiscriminate, unconditional bestowment of God's favor upon men, that God forgives sinners, whether they ask him or not, that somehow, in God's dealing with men, pardon is forced upon them regardless of their moral freedom or any spiritual change, as if by a kind of air-pump God should force the breath of life into unwilling lungs, or at last should come with resurrection power to the souls that have spent their lives in spiritual death. But the Scriptures teach us that if we confess our sins, forgiveness will follow, and condition the divine pardon upon human penitence and confession. This simple condition cannot be said to take away from the freeness of salvation. Whatever may be had for the asking is free enough. If I can have my liberty by acknowledging that I am a prisoner, and asking to be free, my liberty is virtually in my own hands. Such a condition is no barrier to the soul that wants to be free.

Yet confession as a condition of forgiveness must mean genuine, hearty confession, not the empty name of it, or the unmeaning form, but the genuine article. The confession which God requires must be something

different from the thoughtless, formal acknowledgment of imperfection, which feels no personal responsibility and guiltiness. There is a kind of confession which in a general way identifies its offerer with the human family, as not being indeed yet what it ought to be, liable to slip, to err, to do wrong, but in a state of progress, and which represents his faults as more owing to the conditions of his being than to any downright individual depravity. This kind of confession simply makes a man class himself with others, and generally enables him to conclude with the Pharisaic congratulation that he is higher in the scale than the majority. There is another kind of confession which separates the heart from the life, and though it may condemn the one, justifies and praises the other, as if they might cancel each other, or leave something on the credit side of the account. On the other hand, it has been said, "A man will confess sins in *general*, but those sins which he would not have his neighbor know for his right hand, which bow him down in shame like a wind-stricken bulrush, those he passes over in his prayer. Men are willing to be thought sinful in *disposition*, but in *special acts* they are disposed to praise themselves. They therefore confess their depravity, and defend their conduct. They are wrong in general, but right in particular." Indeed, confession is so varied a thing that Mr. Spurgeon once preached a sermon upon the text, "I have sinned," as used by

Pharaoh, Balaam, Saul, Achan, Judas, Job, and the Prodigal, and illustrating seven different kinds of confession. But there can be but one kind of confession that is genuine and acceptable to God. It is the confession which is born of genuine penitence, which is truthful and frank and thorough, which is not weakened and vitiated by self-justification, which does not say, Yes, I have done wrong, but — somebody tempted me, but — the circumstances were against me, but — others have done worse, but — it was the result of inherited propensity, but — it was not so very wrong after all. Sincere confession confesses its sin in a clean, full, humble, manly way, with a deep consciousness of the greatness of its sin, and an earnest determination, by the help of God, to be delivered from its hateful and damning power. It feels to the very centre of its being the sin which it confesses, as David felt it when he said, "I acknowledge my transgressions, and my sin is ever before me," — as the prodigal felt it when he said, "I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee, and am no more worthy to be called thy son," — and as the publican felt it when he cried out in the agony of his prayer and in deep humility of soul, "God be merciful to me the sinner."

It is said of John Bradford that "when he was confessing sin he would never give over confessing till he

felt some brokenness of heart for that sin ; and that when praying for any spiritual mercy, he would never give over the suit until he had got some relish for that mercy." It is to be feared that there is much so-called confession which is unreal and unblessed, which does not go deep enough, which has little realizing sense of the enormity of the sin which it confesses, as something which God hates with the whole force of his holy nature, as the thing which crucified the Son of God upon the shameful cross of Calvary, and which, if not repented of, will destroy both soul and body in hell. We need to offer again and again the old prayer —

" Lord, when we bend before thy throne,
And our confessions pour,
Teach us to feel the sins we own,
And hate what we deplore."

I have said that the Scriptures teach us that confession is the condition of forgiveness and salvation. They teach it everywhere, not to the exclusion of faith in Christ, nor as a substitute for it, for repentance and faith are inseparable. I now add, this condition is no arbitrary requirement. In the very nature of things there can be no genuine forgiveness unless there is genuine confession. We may overlook a wrong done us, but we cannot forgive it until it is repented of and confessed. Forgiveness is the feeling which responds

to confession. Nothing else can call it forth in the heart of man or of God. He who fails to confess his sin fully, frankly, and honestly, can have no peace of mind, or self respect, but he carries about with him the deep consciousness of his wrong doing and a stinging conscience. Hidden sin brings hidden sorrow. Sin unconfessed shuts out the joy of pardon. Sin truly confessed is sin forgiven and sin blotted out.



XIV. THE HOMESICK GERMAN.

XIV.

THE HOMESICK GERMAN.

There is a wonderful power in the recital of Christian experience. Paul believed it, and the story of his conversion was a mighty weapon in his hand, which he wielded for the glory of God. The most successful Christian workers I have known, both men and women, have been those who knew how to tell modestly, tenderly, and effectively what the grace of God had done for them. Could the experiences which are told in our churches by those who apply for membership be written and published, what an interesting library would they make, and what a convincing argument would they be in favor of the truth and power of our gospel! How alike and yet unlike, agreeing so exactly in their vital points, and yet differing so beautifully and wonderfully in their details! Does God keep a record of the workings of his grace, and will the remembrance and recital of Christian experience have anything to do with the happiness of heaven? Who can tell?

I am prompted to put on record a part of the story told by a humble German, who recently applied for membership in a Baptist church. It will be only a part of the story, for for three-quarters of an hour he poured out his heart in a way that alternately

brought tears to the eyes and smiles to the faces of those who heard him, and made the older Christians confess that old-fashioned conversions are not altogether things of the past. The story as written will lack too, I fear, much of the interest which the teller's broken English and peculiar forms of expression gave to it.

Mr. B——, when quite a young man (in 1860, I think), determined to leave his native land and come to America, whither his brother and many friends and neighbors had already gone. His father at first was strongly opposed to his leaving home, but at length, seeing that his son was fully determined, he gave his consent, and the young man embarked in a sailing vessel, with a company of four hundred, bound for New York. He had, of course, been brought up in the faith of the State church, which is satisfied with obedience to certain rites, and makes no demand for inward piety. He knew nothing of saving faith, and had never been brought in contact with any better form of Christianity than that of his family. He had a restless, roving disposition, had roamed about his own country, disliked restraint, was fond of his liberty, and above all of the pleasures of the world. He had thrown his whole heart into the gayeties and frivolities of life, and had no higher or nobler purpose in living.

When the ship was a few days out she encountered a terrific storm, which increased in intensity day after

day. The oldest sailors had seen nothing like it before, and yet, instead of coming to an end, it only grew worse. Fear was upon them all, and again and again the passengers were told that there was no hope, for no ship could outlive such a gale. As is usual in such circumstances, those who had forgotten God before were driven to pray to him for help in this extremity, and Valentine among the rest (for that was his given name) promised the Almighty, over and over again, that if he would spare his life to reach the port, he would consecrate it to his holy service. In the meantime, so long time had elapsed since the sailing of the vessel that she had been given up as lost, and her passengers were mourned as dead. At length, after a passage of fifty-eight days, her arrival was announced at New York, and hundreds of people gathered at the wharf, with great rejoicing, to welcome their friends as from a watery grave.

Amid the festivities that followed, Valentine forgot the solemn vow which he had made unto God in trouble, and after some months he found himself at work among his own people in western Pennsylvania. But God did not forget him. He followed him by his Spirit, ever reminding him by a voice which he could not silence, of the promise which he had made, and calling for its fulfilment. Whether he was at work or seeking worldly pleasures, alone or in company, by day and by night, the call kept coming to him, giving him no rest and no

comfort. Month after month passed away, but he told no one of the great secret trouble that was gnawing at his heart. His appetite left him, the color faded from his cheek, and the joy from his eye, and he seemed fast losing strength and vitality. At first his friends bantered him, saying he was homesick and longed for his fatherland. But soon, when they saw how pale and feeble he was becoming, their banter changed to pity, and they said he must go home or he will die. But still he kept his heavy secret, only replying that he had no means and could not return. At length a ticket was procured for him and put in his hands, and he consented to return to Germany, fixing the time when he would go to New York to set sail, for he was ashamed to tell the cause of his inward trouble, and his heart was still unwilling to yield itself to God.

It was the last evening before his departure. He had been to say good-by to his friends, and returned at ten o'clock to his chamber. The next morning he was to take the early train, and he knew that instead of leaving behind him his heavy, troubled heart, he would take it with him. He took up a neglected Bible and turned its leaves. They seemed to contain nothing but condemnation for him. In a moment of almost frenzy he threw it from him into the corner of the room, determined never to touch it again, for, as he said, he would not have a Bible that only condemned him. But in an

instant he realized what he had done, his will was broken, he burst into tears, he flew to the corner of the room, reaching it, as he said, almost as soon as the Bible, picked up the precious volume, carried it back to the light, and then as he opened it, how changed ! *It contained nothing but promises.* He bowed on his knees in remembrance of his solemn vow, and there penitently, gratefully, lovingly, he gave himself, a new creature, to Christ his Saviour. He hardly knew what the new experience meant, for he was utterly a stranger to such things, and lived among a people who were strangers to them. But into his soul, that had so long been dark and troubled, there came a light and peace such as it had never known. In the morning he was on hand at the appointed time for the early breakfast, but the color of health had begun to reappear, and his face was radiant with the joy that filled his heart. The family saw the change, and rejoiced in it, ascribing it, however, to the flight of the homesickness in anticipation of his speedy return to his native land. Then he sat down and told to their bewildered ears the story of his long and persistent resistance of God's call, and the wonderful grace that had come to him, and astonished them the more by saying, "I shall not take the train to New York this morning. I shall surrender my ticket to Germany, for I prefer to remain in a land where. I have found Christ precious to me, and I shall

not be troubled with *homesickness* any more, for my poor soul has found its home."

Amid much opposition and persecution from friends, he united with a Methodist church, which was the only church near him that could sympathize with his spiritual change. After seventeen years of labor in that fellowship, during which there had been a deepening conviction in his mind that he had not rendered obedience to the positive command of Christ to be baptized, he with his wife, who had been led to the same conviction, have now together made happy profession of their faith in the buried and risen Lord, and confess to a sense of completeness which they had never felt before.



XV. THE LOST JESUS.



XV.

THE LOST JESUS.

We can well believe Mary when she said to the child Jesus, whom she found in the temple after that three days' absence, "Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing," or, as it might be rendered, we have been searching for thee in great distress. Their love for him was the love of parents for their children, deepened, it may be, a thousand-fold by the tender mystery that was about his birth, and the singular purity, beauty and loveliness of his character. They must have loved with a peculiar affection a child who had been committed to their care so strangely, about whom were gathered such sacred hopes, and who was in himself so pre-eminently lovely. As year by year they had watched him developing in all sweetness of disposition and obedience of conduct, not so much instructed by them as their instructor, and shedding the light of his holy life in all their home, how their hearts must have been drawn out to him, until he had become the one object for which they lived, the joy of their joys, the hope of their hopes, the centre around which all life moved to them !

And this year they had taken him, a bright lad of twelve years, up to the great festival of their people.

The joys of the festival are over, and their faces are turned toward their Galilean home. But "the child Jesus tarried behind in Jerusalem." The parents, all unconscious of his absence, went on without him. In the words of Canon Farrar — "A day elapsed before the parents discovered their loss ; this they would not do until they arrived at the place of evening rendezvous, and all day long they would be free from all anxiety, supposing that the boy was with some other group of friends or relatives in that long caravan. But when evening came, and diligent inquiries led to no trace of him, they would learn the bitter fact that he was altogether missing from the band of returning pilgrims. The next day, in alarm and anguish — perhaps, too, with some sense of self-reproach that they had not been more faithful to their sacred charge — they retraced their steps to Jerusalem. The country was in a wild and unsettled state. The ethnarch Archelaus, after ten years of cruel and disgraceful reign, had recently been deposed by the Emperor, and banished to Vienne, in Gaul. The Romans had annexed the province over which he had ruled, and the introduction of their system of taxation by Coponius, the first procurator, had kindled the revolt which, under Judas of Gamala and the Pharisee Sadoc, wrapped the whole country in a storm of sword and flame. This disturbed state of the political horizon would not only render their

journey more difficult when they had left the shelter of the caravan, but would also intensify their dread lest, among all the wild elements of warring nationalities, which, at such a moment, were assembled about the walls of Jerusalem, their son should have met with harm. Truly, on that day of misery and dread, must the sword have pierced through the virgin mother's heart ! ”

The city was reached in safety, but alas ! the object of their search was not yet found. Their minds were well nigh distracted by painful fears and wild imaginings. Every hour added terror to the suspense. It was not until the third day that the lost boy was recovered, and their distress at last relieved. Then it was that Mary, over-joyed, and it may be, not a little troubled that Jesus should have willingly occasioned them so much alarm, said to him in language of mingled love and chiding, “ Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us ? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing.”

Have you ever lost a child, who had wandered from home, when you supposed him to be playing safely in the garden under the window ; or who had been separated from you in the crowded thoroughfare, when you thought him nigh at your side ? The moment you became conscious of your loss, your heart trembled within you ; you called loudly again and again the dear

name, but no answer came back ; you inquired frantically of every passer-by if he had seen a lost child ; you thought quickly what might have happened — injured by some accident, crushed by some heavy carriage, stolen by some human fiend, crying and sobbing with strangers, and longing for mamma and home. Have you ever passed through such an experience ? It may have been only for an hour, it may have been only for a few moments. You were incapable of being pacified ; your heart was breaking for only one comfort, the sight of that dear face again. If you have known such an experience as that, then you know how to sympathize with Mary and Joseph, as they searched for two long nights and a day for their lost Jesus.

Jesus, when he took upon himself our nature, became kin to us all. When he was born into the world, he was born not simply into the family of Mary and Joseph, but into your family and mine. He entered into relations with all the families of the children of men, that he might live in them as Son and Saviour, and shed among them the light of his infinite grace and redeeming love. Verily, he called himself the Son of man, as well as the Son of God. No family circle is complete without him. No home on earth is perfect if he is wanting in it. Joseph's family should not be the only one that is alarmed and anxious, when it is found that Christ is not there. Sad to say, he who came to

seek and to save that which was lost, may himself be lost sight of amid the world's throng and pleasures, cares and friendships, and he who came to bring the wanderers back to God and hope, may be compelled to be a wanderer from the homes, the hearts, and the love of men. Parents and children may be there, but if Christ is missing, the board is an empty board, and no warm, cheerful fires of eternal hope burn on the sombre hearth. Sad is the home, and sad should feel the home, which has in it no Christ.

Is Jesus a lost Jesus to you, dear reader? Have you never sought him and never found him? You have begun your journey towards your long home. During the bright days of prosperity you may not miss the absent Christ, though there is no prosperity that is not brightened a hundred-fold by his divine presence. But when the night comes, the night of sorrow, of temptation, and of death, men wake up to the lonely reality, and despairingly cry, where, oh, where is Christ, the neglected, the lost Christ? Christ is always needed. In no human heart, in no journey of life is there true and abiding joy until Christ is found.

“Jesus, thou joy of loving hearts,
Thou fount of life! thou light of men!
From the best bliss that earth imparts,
We turn unfilled to thee again.

“Thy truth unchanged hath ever stood;
Thou savest those that on thee call;
To them that seek thee, thou art good,
To them that find thee, All in All.”



XVI. MY FATHER'S BUSINESS.

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MY FATHER'S BUSINESS.

These suggestive words were contained in the reply of the child Jesus to his mother, who gently chided him for his voluntary absence, when at the age of twelve he tarried in Jerusalem, and allowed the caravan, in which were Joseph and Mary, to go on without him. They set forth the reason of his conduct. It was not that he loved the earthly mother less, but the heavenly Father more. There was no loss of human affection, but the incoming of a stronger passion. It is not necessary to suppose that there was on the part of Christ any waywardness, or disobedience, or even thoughtlessness of a mother's anxiety and distress of heart. The seamless robe of his perfect life was not rent at this point. The spotless purity of his spirit suffered no stain. A new call, and that call *from above*, was beginning to sound in his ears. The meaning and object of his great mission were beginning to dawn upon his mind. We may say, perhaps, that, at this time, to the boy Jesus life took on a higher purpose, and its current flowed with a broader sweep. He had come up to

Jerusalem, and mingled in its solemn worship, and looked upon its conflicting scenes, until his soul was deeply moved and his ear caught the divine summons.

Mr. Thomas Hughes, in his little volume, "The Manliness of Christ," thus explains this incident in Christ's boyhood : "All that he heard and saw in the Holy City, among the crowds of worshippers, and the rabbis teaching in the temple courts—the first view of the holy hill of Sion, the joy of the whole earth—the strange contrast of the eager traffic, the gross Mammon worship, the huge slaughtering of beasts, with all the brutal accompaniments, with that universal longing and expectation in those multitudes for the Messiah, who should lead and work out the final deliverance and triumph of the people of God in that generation, must have stirred new questionings within him, questionings whether that voice which he had been already hearing in his own heart was not only *a* call, such as might come to any Hebrew boy, but *the* call—whether among all that vast assembly he was not the one upon whom the supreme task must be laid, who must be the deliverer of his people, so certainly and eagerly looked for. To the young spirit before whose inward eye such a vision is opening, all human ties would shrink back, and be for the moment forgotten. And when recalled suddenly by the words of his mother, the half-conscious, dreamy answer, 'How is it

that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's courts, about his business?' loses all its apparent wilfulness and abruptness."

In this experience of Christ's boyhood, then, we find a waking up to a fuller consciousness of the great mission which he came upon earth to fulfil. "My Father's business!" This was his motto and his inspiration. Not yet had the time come for him to sunder all human ties. He must still go back to the Galilean home and be subject to his parents. But when he embarked upon his public ministry, to be misunderstood and rejected by men and forsaken even by his brethren, when he confronted the cross of death, which he must first bear before it bore him, he knew no other motive and felt no higher impulse than this, "My Father's business."

There are times in the lives of men to-day when they feel the incoming and resistless influence of a mightier motive, when a stronger passion takes possession and control of them than the strong passion of human affection, not supplanting it, but holding it in abeyance, until it has accomplished its purpose for evil or for good.

How sometimes an evil passion or appetite, like the appetite for strong drink, gets the mastery of the soul, and rising above not only self-respect and love of virtue, but even love of home, of parents, of wife, of chil-

dren, launches one, no, not one, but thousands and tens of thousands, forth upon the wild and deadly sea of dissipation, and they are found at last, not in the holy temple of God, but in that horrible temple of Satan, where character, hope, happiness and human souls are the smoking sacrifices !

On the other hand, see how sometimes love of country proves stronger than love of family and home, and leads one forth in the hour of the nation's peril, even to the surrender of life, that honor and liberty may be preserved in the land. The natural affections are not weakened ; they even grow stronger under the strain that is put upon them ; but another principle, another passion has come in to guide and determine the conduct.

Or, take a still higher illustration, where a servant of Christ, out of love to Christ and perishing heathen, turns his back upon home and native land, its loved ones, its friendships, its joys, its advantages, and puts oceans between them and him, and spends his life surrounded by darkness, discomfort, loneliness, peril, disgusting superstition and savage barbarism. There is no insensibility of heart ; there is no weakening or paralysis of natural ties ; they never bind so tightly as when the moment of separation comes ; yet go he must, for a divine passion, the spirit of Christ's love and self-surrender which brought him down to earth,

has taken possession of his servant, and at his Master's bidding he leaves all and follows him.

And, indeed, something of this kind occurs at every genuine conversion to Christ. A new passion comes into the soul, be it in manhood or in boyhood. A strong and controlling principle begins to work. The love of Jesus is shed abroad in the heart, which, while it does not destroy any natural affection, rises superior to them all. This is what Christ meant when he said: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" — not that filial or parental affection is wrong, but right, and ordained by God himself; but that into these loving hearts of ours a new love enters, which may indeed add new strength and beauty to all natural affections, and at the same time be the supreme and dominant passion of the soul.

Christ was not forgetful of Joseph and Mary; his love was stronger and tenderer than human sen ever felt; yet he must be about his Father's business. Mary's heart was pierced with anxious sorrow when she thought she had lost her boy, as they journeyed homeward. Her soul was pierced with still deeper anguish when she saw her son, now grown to manhood, hanging upon the cross of shame and suffering. Yet Jesus was not forgetful or unloving. He could even so far forget his own agony, in that final hour, as to make

provision for his mother's future comfort. But—he must be about his Father's business. Just so when the strong love of Christ comes into the heart, then friend says to friend, companion to companion, child to parent, Do not think me less loving and true; by the grace of God I hope to be more loving and more true; but I must follow Christ, I must obey the divine call, I must be about my Father's business. It is not that I love you less, but that I love Jesus more. The new love rises above all other loves, and becomes the master passion of the soul, constraining its possessor to say to the world and its allurements, to selfishness and its indulgences, to sin and its servants, "How is it that ye seek me? Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?"

It should be added that the life which has not felt the thrill of this divine call, and yielded to its high behest, is still a selfish, worldly, unspiritual life. It is not lived according to the eternal principles of right and duty. It is not lived for heavenly and enduring rewards. It is not lived in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, listen to the divine call to-day, and obey the heavenly prompting, that life may be filled with a holy purpose, and take on grander proportions and an upward look. You may be still in the morning of life. Jesus was but a lad of twelve years. Or you may have advanced to manhood and maturity. But whatever

your age or condition, you are God's creature, created in his image, subject to his supreme authority and accountable to him. The path of obedience may seem steep and difficult ; yet it is the only path to peace and glory. For no life is blessed, no life is satisfactory, no life is truly honorable, no life has the promise of the hereafter, unless it is moved, controlled and lived on this principle — *I must be about my Father's business.*



XVII. JUSTICE AND MERCY.

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JUSTICE AND MERCY.

The apostle John states first the *condition* and then the *ground* of the divine forgiveness in these words : “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just (or righteous, as the Revision has it) to forgive us our sins.” I think many persons are surprised at the reading of the second clause of this verse. It certainly reads differently from what they would expect. Any one would naturally suppose that the verse would be completed in a way something like this : If we confess our sins, he is *merciful* and *gracious* to forgive us our sins, or words to that effect. We ordinarily ascribe our salvation to the divine attribute of love, to the infinite mercy of God. And, indeed, this is right, for the Psalmist said, “Thou hast not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities ;” that is, God has not dealt with us as we justly deserved. Again, he said, “If thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand?”

In other words, let strict justice have its course, and not one person of the whole human family could have a ray of hope.

Yet John tells us, "If we confess our sins, he is *faithful* and *just* to forgive us our sins." What can it mean? For this language certainly declares to us that the forgiveness of the sinner, on the condition here laid down, grounds itself in the fidelity and justice of God; so that the salvation of the truly penitent man rests not only upon the mercy, but upon the righteousness of the Almighty; in other words, upon the whole nature of God.

I think we shall be able to understand the meaning of these words of John, if we stop a moment and inquire, to what is God faithful, and to whom is he just, when he forgives the penitent? These questions bring us face to face with the great plan of redemption, that wonderful exhibition of divine mercy and righteousness, in which God has given to men his promise, and entered into solemn covenant with them in his Son Jesus Christ. So that now, if we truly confess our sins, we are told that God will be faithful to his promise, he will be just to his own crucified Son. Outside of Christ, God's justice would only condemn us; but in Christ that attribute as well as his mercy is pledged to our forgiveness; so that on the fidelity and justice of God rests the hope of our salvation.

Paul in his letter to the Romans speaks of the purpose of Christ's work as being that God might be just and the justifier of him who believeth in Jesus ; but John goes farther, and says not only that God is just when he justifies the penitent believer, but that he would not be just, if he did not forgive and justify him ; in other words (I say it reverently), he would be unfaithful to the promise which he has made, he would be untrue to his own solemn covenant, he would be false to his crucified Son.

We need not fear, then, if we are truly penitent for our sins and long for God's pardon, what his justice may do unto us. It is our truest friend, and is actively enlisted in our service. The justice which once condemned us, now secures for us forgiveness and salvation. This is the assurance of our hope and the ground of our confidence. He has promised, and he will fulfil it. "He abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself." The scheme of our redemption which infinite wisdom devised and infinite love executed, infinite justice will stand by to the end. Dr. Guthrie beautifully says : "Like two streams which unite their separate waters to form a common river, justice and mercy are combined in the work of redemption. Like the two cherubim whose wings met above the ark ; like the two devout and holy men who drew the nails from Christ's body, and bore it to the grave ; like the two angels who re-

ceived it in charge, and seated like mourners within the sepulchre — the one at the head, the other at the feet — kept silent watch over the precious treasure ; justice and mercy are associated with the work of Christ. They are the supporters of the shield on which the cross is emblazoned ; they sustain the arms of our heavenly Advocate ; they form the two solid and eternal pillars of the Mediator's throne. On Calvary mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace embrace each other."



XVIII. ONE LESSON OF PENTECOST.



XVIII.

ONE LESSON OF PENTECOST.

There is no more interesting, instructive and encouraging study for the Christian Church than the scenes connected with its origin and early growth. In those scenes, the record of which has been left for us by no ordinary historian, we find some of the most delightful encouragements for our Christian faith, and some of the most important lessons to guide us in our service in Christ's kingdom. If Pentecost, that glorious outburst of divine power upon a community that seemed well nigh dead and immovable, was to characterize the Spirit's dispensation which it ushered in, was typical and prophetic of what we are to expect all down the Christian centuries, then we can not be too familiar with that early revival, with all its lessons as well as its blessed scenes and results, and our every contemplation of it may kindle within us new, and deeper, and more earnest longings for its fresh repetition, and give to us a better spiritual preparation for its coming.

It may be asked, do you not think that Pentecost was an extraordinary event, brought about at that time in the Church's history for a peculiar purpose, and that

therefore it hardly furnishes a safe guide for subsequent expectations? It was certainly an extraordinary event, and in some of its features it was unique and forever to remain unparalleled. The sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, the flames of fire, the gift of tongues, those external, miraculous evidences of the presence of the Spirit, may not be again expected. But in its spiritual significance and its general objects, as well as in the human conditions which preceded it, Pentecost has found a successor in every revival that has since occurred in the world, and gathered scores or hundreds, or thousands into the churches of Christ; and it will be looked upon to the end of time as a true guide and instructor by those who are longing and praying for the conversion of men and for the full coming of the Redeemer's kingdom.

The purpose of Pentecost may now be seen in the light of the effects which it produced. It was to be a fresh, divine seal of Christianity, a powerful and convincing proof of its heavenly character and origin. If there ever was a time when Christianity needed such a proof and attestation of its claims, it was then. The few weak disciples of Christ were passing through dark days, which had lengthened into weeks of humiliation and trial. Fifty days before, their Master had been crucified. His enemies had put an end to him, and

the spear that pierced the side of the dying man upon the cross was supposed to have pricked his foolish and blasphemous pretensions, and to have quieted forever the little excitement which he had made. To be sure, in three days after his burial, Christ rose from the dead, and ten days before Pentecost he had ascended into heaven. But the people knew nothing of this, or if they had heard it, they did not believe it. To them Christ was dead and buried. His brief career had come to a sudden and shameful end. His claims were now shown to be utterly absurd, and all his boastings foolishness. The conclusion had proved that he was at least deluded, if not an impostor, as many were inclined to think. In their judgment the disciples of Christ had pinned their faith to the dictum of a poor, weak, dead man, and being drawn to him by a strange fascination, had committed their all to him and had lost it, being now the laughing-stock of all the community. If men had ever been disposed to believe in this professed King and Saviour, they had so such disposition now. After his ignominious failure and the bursting of all his grand schemes, nothing could be farther from their thoughts than faith in him. Christ, his professions, his kingdom, his religion, had like the foolish man's house of which he spoke, all been built upon the sand, and had been swept away and gone to pieces.

What could re-establish his kingdom, prove the veracity of his claims, and give him now a hold upon the incredulous minds of men? What could prove the living power, the Messiahship, the rightful Sovereignty and Kingship of this man, whom they had seen crucified and put to death? Nothing, but the unmistakable seal and endorsement of heaven, as seen in the signs, wonders and glorious results of Pentecost. And these did it. The dead man was proved to be true Prophet and living King. His truth, which they had crushed to earth, reappeared clothed with immortal strength. His kingdom which they had puffed away with angry breath, began to rise a real and substantial thing among them. It was as if a new voice from heaven spake unto them, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased," so that all the house of Israel might know assuredly that God had made that same Jesus, whom they had crucified, both Lord and Christ. To our eyes, I say, it seems not only desirable but absolutely necessary that the effect of the humiliation and apparent failure at the crucifixion should be overcome by this marvellous display of power and grace before all the people, and that the honor of Christ, whom they had mocked and put to shame, should be signally vindicated in the eyes of all.

Such is always one purpose in revivals of religion.

They are God's repeated endorsement of the divine nature of Christianity, and set a new seal upon its claims. They lift the name of Christ out of the dust in which it may have been dragged, and exalt it, and make it glorious. They are the very best reply that can be made to materialists. They are an unanswerable argument against atheists and skeptics. They put the crown anew upon the brow of Christ in the presence of his maligners and persecutors. When the Church seems to be under a cloud by reason of the fierce assaults of its enemies or the shameful defection of its professed friends, a revival scatters the darkness, and reveals the face of its divine King, and delivers it out of all its troubles. A revival is the panacea for all our spiritual ills, and raises once more into the clear heavens the name of the crucified. Another has said, "The quiet conversion of one sinner after another, under the ordinary ministry of the gospel, must always be regarded with feelings of satisfaction and gratitude by the ministers and disciples of Christ; but a periodical manifestation of the simultaneous conversion of thousands is also to be desired, because of its adaptation to afford a visible and impressive demonstration that God has made that same Jesus who was rejected and crucified, both Lord and Christ, and that, in virtue of his divine mediatorship, he has assumed the royal sceptre of uni-

versal supremacy, and must reign till all his enemies be made his footstool. It is therefore reasonable to expect that from time to time he will repeat that, which, on the day of Pentecost formed the conclusive and crowning evidence of his Messiahship and Sovereignty."



XIX. HOLINESS, NOT HAPPINESS.

XIX.

HOLINESS, NOT HAPPINESS.

What is the true aim of life and the great end of religion? I answer, *personal holiness* — a truth which needs to be emphasized to-day, when so many persons look upon religion as a matter of the emotions, make the feelings the test of piety, and think the Christian life consists in being happy rather than in being holy, in “feeling good” rather than in living righteously.

If we examine the Word of God, which is of course our great religious directory, and explains to us the nature and divine purpose of revealed religion, we shall find that it bears uniform and unvarying testimony on this point. The gospel is called “the way of holiness.” Believers in Christ are said to be “elected to holiness” “new created in holiness,” and to “have their fruit unto holiness.” They are commanded to “yield their members as instruments of holiness,” to “present their bodies to God in holiness,” to have “their conversation in holiness,” and to seek “perfection in holiness.” And at last, it is said, they shall be “presented to God in holiness,” for “without holiness no man shall see God.” The name of Jesus, given to him by God ante-natally, reveals the one great,

significant purpose of his birth, his life, his death, his whole work and mission on earth. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins," and so it is written, "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin."

Whether, therefore, we look at the divine thought in the manifestation of Christ among men, or at the precepts and commandments enjoined upon those who became his disciples, we find that they all point in one direction and towards one worthy and sublime end, viz.: holiness of character, purity of heart, perfection of life and being; in a word, conformity to the image of Christ. To present the inspired testimony on this point would be to rehearse, in great part, the entire utterance and teaching of the word of God. It offers no conflicting testimony. It gives no uncertain sound. The one great, clearly-defined purpose of the gospel is to make men holy. Christ came to save men from their sins.

Or if we look at the life of Christ, who is acknowledged to be, in the spirit which animated him, and in the ends for which he lived, the one authoritative example for us all, what do we find? Whoever gets the impression from the study of his life that he was seeking his own comfort or happiness; that he performed a single act or lived a single day with a simple reference to the gratification of his own desire, regardless of that

holy divine will which he acknowledged to be the supreme law of his life, or that he, in any sense, consulted his own present joy in the labors and activities which crowded his brief earthly existence? Is not his life always represented as a life of obedience, of holy devotion and unquestioning loyalty to the will of another in spite of all painful consequences, of thoughtful, self-forgetting service for that humanity whose sins and woes he took upon himself, of willing self-surrender even unto the shame and agony of the crucifixion? Did he not say in explanation of the purpose of his earthly mission and of the motives which guided and determined all his life, "I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me?" — not that there was any conflict between the will of the Father and the will of the Son, for they were one in heart, in purpose, and in being; but here in his earthly manifestation the place of the Son was that of entire subordination, and the spirit which he was to illustrate for us all, was the spirit of unqualified and unquestioning obedience.

And so, from the beginning of his life, when at the age of twelve years the divine call came to him, and there dawned upon his expanding mind the vision of his life-work, and he said to his human parents, "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business," until the final struggle and passion and tragedy, when he cried,

“Nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt,” the life of Christ was never a seeking after happiness or a pursuit of comfort, but always, first and foremost, a life of obedience, an illustration of holiness, an exemplification of unswerving righteousness. He might be “despised and rejected of men ;” he might be called “a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief ;” that was of little moment. But no man must be able to convince him of sin ; the robe of his perfect righteousness must be without rent or seam.

Or look, once more, at the moral nature of man, and the fundamental place which that nature holds in our being. We are more than creatures of sensibilities, to be moved to joy or sorrow, to smiles or tears, whose highest glory consists in being happy, who are capable of that and nothing more. There is a deeper and more essential element in our manhood. We are created in the moral likeness of God, a likeness which, though marred and defaced by sin, is nevertheless the supreme characteristic of our being, and its recovery and restoration must be the great end of religion, the sublime goal of life. It is but a meagre and trivial description of man to say he is a creature who is capable of happiness and of sorrow, of pleasure and of pain. In that he may differ little from the rest of the animal creation. It is not that which distinguishes him, though his joy may be sweeter and his pain may

be keener than that of other animals. It is a higher and more accurate definition of man to say that he is a creature endowed with moral nature and perceptions, and capable of doing right, of loving truth and duty, and of obeying his conscience and his God. Sensibilities! They are but the surface of our nature, while underneath is the great bulk and volume of intellectual and moral being. What difference does it make whether the sunbeams dance upon the river's surface or the wild winds ruffle it, if only the whole current of our being is onward, irresistibly onward towards God and holiness? "As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation;" that is, in the entire spirit and conduct of your life.



XX. WHY BECOME CHRISTIANS?

WHY BECOME CHRISTIANS?

It being taken for granted, as it surely will be, that holiness, and not happiness, is the true aim of religion and end of life, ought not the basis of the frequent religious appeals which are made to men, to be changed and brought into harmony with this acknowledged principle? Men are oftenest persuaded to become Christians because of the joy, the happiness which such a course will bring to them here and hereafter, in this world and the world to come. We emphasize the peace which comes to the forgiven soul, and lay great stress upon the joys of salvation, contrasting the joys of the Christian with the fading and unsatisfying joys which the world has to offer. All this is true. Your heart and mine, fellow Christian, know how true it is from their own blessed experience, and undoubtedly this aspect of the Christian life ought not to be overlooked.

But is there not a higher, truer and (shall I not say it?) manlier method of appeal and approach to men? There is nothing that ought to touch and influence moral beings so much as moral reasons. Men ought to love God and acknowledge the claims of his Son

Jesus Christ upon them, because it is right. Men ought to repent of their sins and seek the forgiveness of God, not simply because of the joy which it will bring to their souls, but because it is their immediate and unquestionable duty. Men ought to believe in Christ, and to begin and continue a life of cheerful obedience to Christ, because God commands it, and every want of their moral nature impels them to it. Love Christ, become Christians, not simply or principally that you may be happy, but that you may be holy, and that your whole moral and spiritual being may be quickened into a new life, and brought into harmony with the holy will of God. Children may be influenced by an appeal based upon an offered happiness, though even they are influenced by a sense of right, and duty, and moral obligation earlier than we are wont to think. But it seems extremely childish to make the being happy the strong motive for becoming Christians to intelligent moral beings, who, with all the force of their moral nature, ought to be seeking after God and holiness. Moreover, I say it deliberately, to put Christianity in competition with the pleasures of the world is to degrade Christianity. It has higher motives, and nobler and holier rewards.

Here is the reason why some persons, who appear to begin the Christian life, soon lose their zeal and the warmth of their first love. They make the mistake of

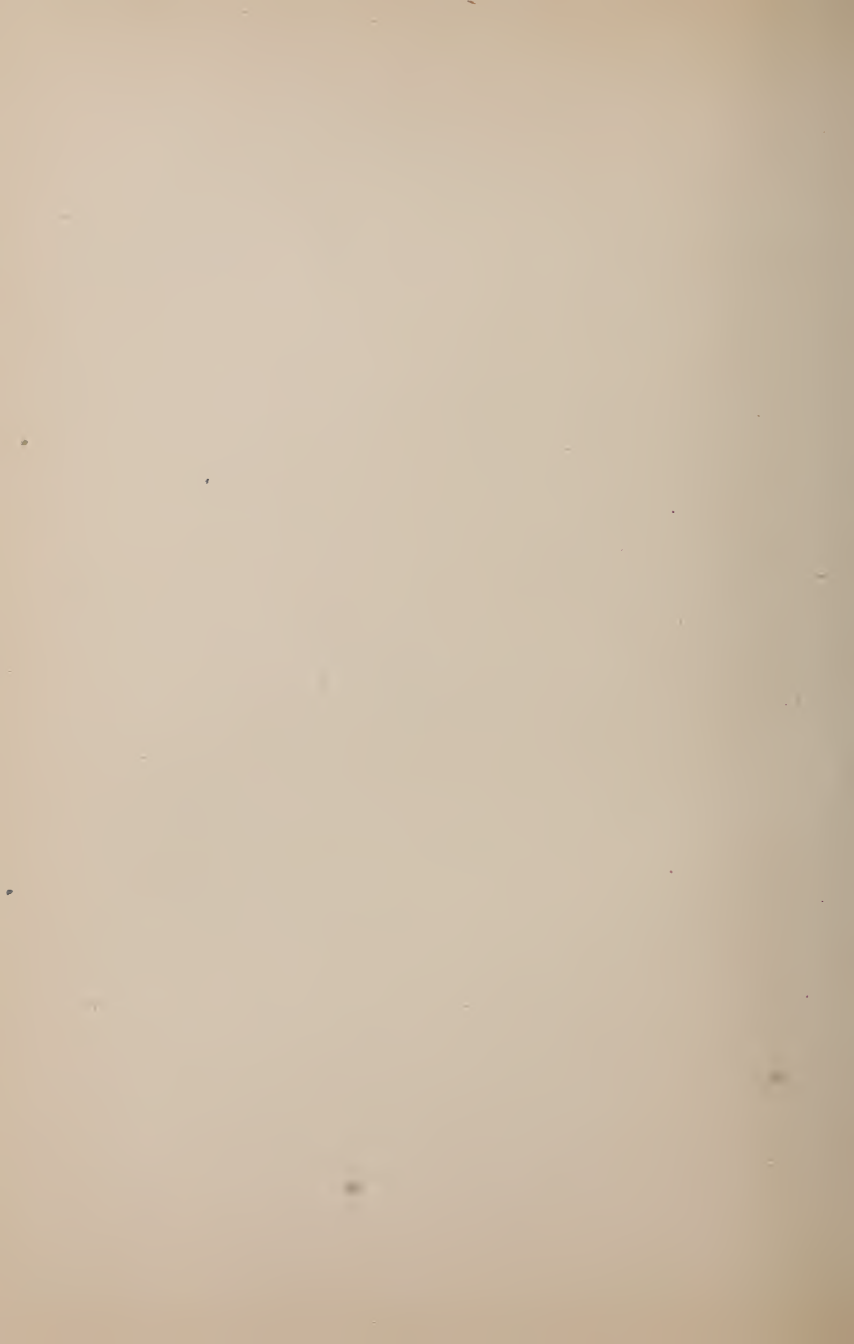
making happiness the end of religion. And when they find from actual experience that the old words which Christ spoke still hold true, "If any man will be my disciple, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me," and, "If ye love me, keep my commandments," that there is the denying of self, the bearing of the cross, the doing of Christ's holy commandments, they experience a feeling of disappointment, for they had started out with the idea that to be a Christian was not primarily to be holy, but to be happy; and to most persons happiness consists in having their own way, in doing as they please, and not in pleasing another. It was a suggestive remark of a bright old lady, ninety-two years of age, to a visitor, that now that she was so old there was very little that she wanted — she only wanted to have her own way. But the Christian is to please not himself, but Christ, and to consult not his own comfort, but the will of his divine Master, not his own ease and preference, but right and duty; and he finds that God's ways are not always the ways of his unsanctified heart.

Who of us has not found sometimes that the path of duty lies right in the teeth of apparent comfort and happiness; that the personal wish must be repressed; that the strong preference must be strangled; that the trembling desire must be crucified; that the warm affection must be torn limb from limb; and that

at the distinct call of God and of duty, the tenderest, strongest ties must be severed, and the soul go forth like the patriarch, not knowing whither it goes ? Oh, when will the Church of Christ learn that not man's will, but God's will, is to be done in and through every individual member ; or rather man's will, only as it is God's will ; that whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate, not to ease and comfort and the gratification of self, but to be conformed to the image of his obedient and self-denying Son, and that obedience is better than comfort, and holiness more to be desired than happiness ? And when will it go forth to the world, itself adorned with the beauty of holiness in all its parts, uttering in every man's ear the solemn trumpet-tone of its divine message : "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin." "Be ye, therefore, holy, for God is holy."

It should be added that while happiness pursued as an end vanishes away, holiness pursued as an end brings happiness to the soul at last as its inevitable accompaniment and the soul's everlasting possession.

XXI. GOD'S DELAY.



XXI.

GOD'S DELAY.

One reason for God's delay in the judgment of sin is, we are told, that he may give men an opportunity to repent and be saved — “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” Men are forever misunderstanding the dealings of God with them. If God does not appear to take notice of their conduct and to visit them with speedy punishment for their sin, they infer that he is ignorant of it. “How doth God know, and is there knowledge with the Most High?” Or, what is worse still, and farther from the truth, if possible, they infer that he approves their course. Because God seems to let them alone for a little while, or allows them to have a measure of prosperity, they are wont to think themselves justified in his sight.

But verily God does know, and verily God does condemn. Sin can find no hiding-place from his all-piercing eye. Up and down this world his glance flies, penetrating all the dark places of human life and character, making luminous the concealed corners where illicit deeds are done, and taking notice of the unexpressed thoughts of all hearts. It is said “Guard

well thy thoughts, for thoughts are heard in heaven." Under such daily, hourly, momentary inspection every human being lives. We are apt to think only of man, and to order our conduct as in his sight, asking ourselves, will he discover it, will he find it out, and to forget that the great eye of God is following us in all our doings and thinkings, and that "all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do." If there is one thing that may well sit as sentinel over the affections of our hearts, the workings of our minds, the activities of our hands, the paths of our feet, it is the solemn thought, "Thou God seest me."

But God does more than see. Wherever his eye rests, he finds something to condemn. There is no heart so pure that he does not see in it the defilement of sin. There is no character so fair that he does not detect in it many a flaw. There is no life so perfect and lovely that he does not say "one thing thou lackest." And this God, so far-seeing, so heart-searching, "is of purer eyes than to behold evil, and can not look on iniquity."

If, therefore, God knows, and if he condemns, how can he spare? Jesus, when he dwelt among men, left for them this beautiful and impressive parable: "A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and

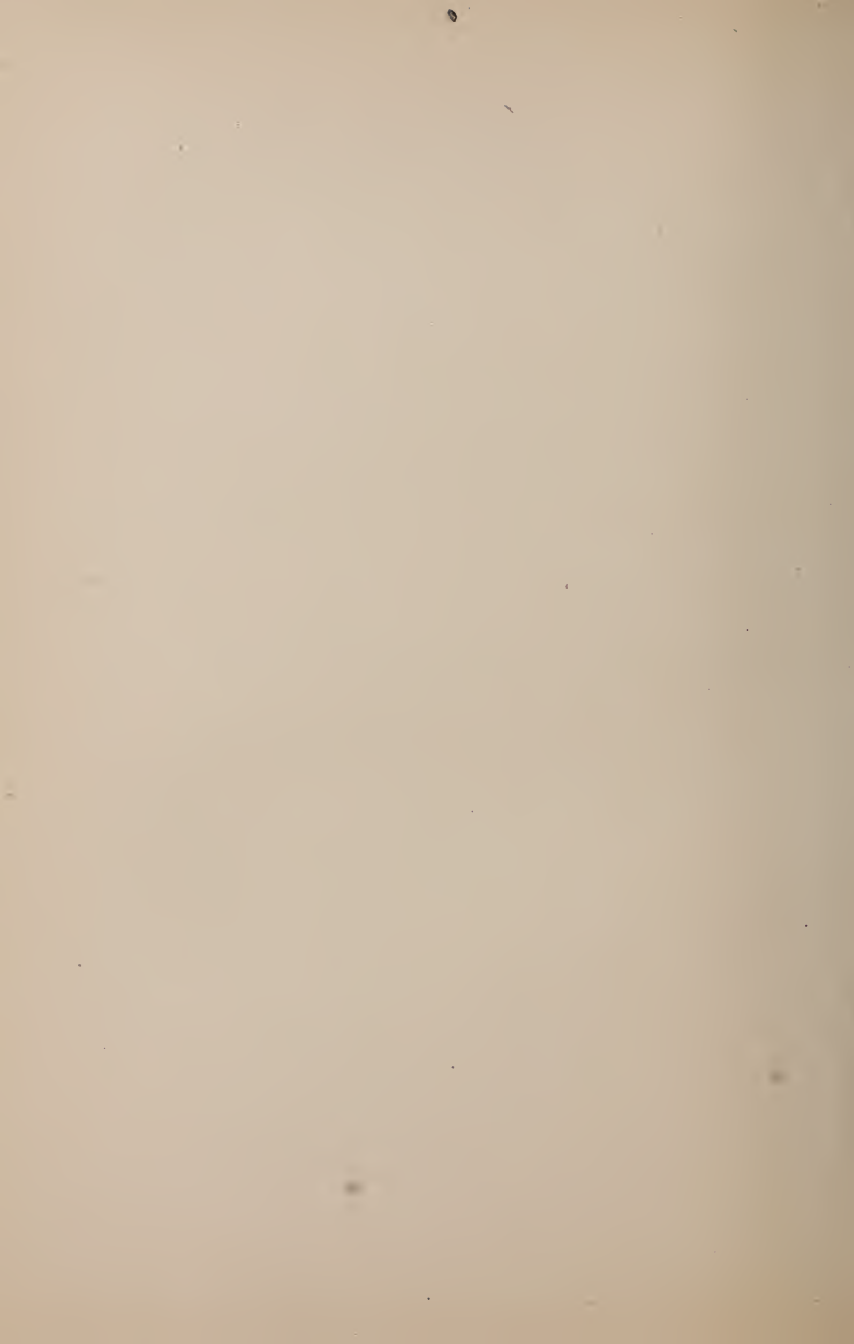
he came and sought fruit thereon and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, behold these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none; cut it down, why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it and dung it; and if it bear fruit, well; and if not, then after that, thou shalt cut it down." "If it bear fruit" — if man repents, and brings forth fruit meet for repentance, "well." The lifted ax is stayed; the condemned tree is spared; another year is added to its existence; its time of probation is lengthened. So I look upon every added year of life, every added month, every added week, every added Sabbath, as but another opportunity for the impenitent to repent and turn unto God. God withholds his judgment, he delays the coming of that fatal hour which will usher them into his presence, he wards off repeated dangers, he raises them up from sickness, he prolongs their days, "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

It is said that Roman magistrates, when they gave sentence upon any one to be scourged, had a bundle of rods, tied hard with many knots, laid before them. The reason was this — that whilst the beadle or flagellator was untying the knots, which he was to do by order, and not in any sudden or hasty way, the magistrate

might see the deportment of the criminal, whether he was sorry for his fault, and showed any hope of amendment, that then he might recall his sentence, or mitigate his punishment ; otherwise he was corrected so much the more severely. Thus God, the divine Magistrate, interposes delay after delay, and ties up the rods of his anger with many a hard knot, that men may have time to confess their sins, and look unto him for mercy and forgiveness.



XXII. WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST?



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WHAT THINK YE OF CHRIST ?

It has been said that "Christ is the touchstone of the human heart," the flinty jasper that determines the presence of any heavenly metal in the earthly alloy of human affection and desire and passion. He is the magnet that detects the presence or absence of the iron of a devout faith or a holy love in the sands of the soul's life. Would you know the disposition, the true, spiritual character of your own soul, or of any soul, apply Christ to it. The present condition, as well as the everlasting destiny of a man, is determined by his relation to the great Son of God. What think ye of Christ? has been made the test question of human character and human hope. The treatment which men give to the only Saviour of the world, more than any thing else, reveals their true character and standing in the sight of God.

You might apply this test to the theologies and religious faiths of men. As they exalt or ignore God's Son, the once crucified and now risen Christ, so are they valuable or worthless for the production of genuine character or for purposes of general salvation. How many

pretentious beliefs, advocated by men to-day, would be unable to bear the test, and would be found to be utterly empty of spiritual power and of substantial hope! They have in them no room for the divine Christ and the uplifting and saving power of his cross.

But it is with individual character and individual hope that I have to do at this time. This is the important truth which I wish to set forth and emphasize—a man's relation to Jesus Christ determines his relation to God.

I shall pass by the essential oneness of the Father and Son, and speak of Christ simply as the manifested Son of God. As men think of him, and treat him, and honor him, so is their attitude and disposition towards him that sent him.

I am aware that some persons seem to think that they can ignore Christ, and neglect his claims, and disregard his person and work, and still be God's spiritual children, and their hearts be right in his sight. But let us see how impossible this is, and that really the offer of Christ to the soul is the unfailing test of its disposition towards God.

You will remember that Christ said "I am the door," the door that God has opened into his presence, and into the possession of all spiritual safety and blessing, and that he solemnly averred that "no man cometh

unto the Father but by me." Now, if Christ is the door, the one door which God has provided of approach to himself, and of entrance into life, what possible hopeful relation can we sustain to him, if we persistently despise the only entrance to his fellowship and regard? If we expect to enjoy the hospitality of a home we must knock at the door, and make friends with the appointed door-keeper, especially if the door-keeper is the honored Son himself.

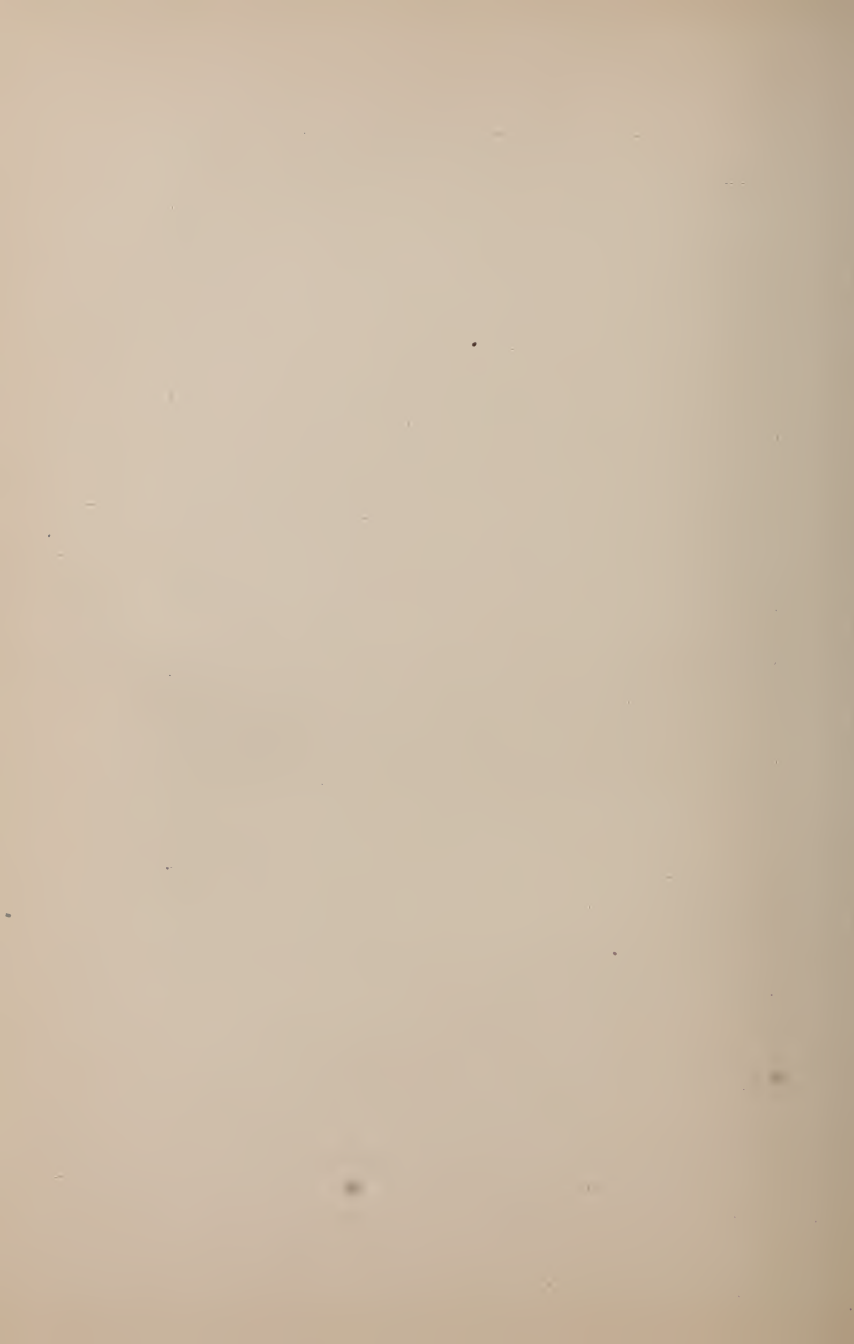
But Christ said more than that. To those who claimed to be God's spiritual children, because of their natural descent from his servant, Abraham, Christ put this very simple and authoritative test: "If God were your Father, ye would love me." This shall be the test of all true spiritual relationship to God, that the heart is found drawn out in love to him whom God has sent to be our Saviour. Anybody can apply the test to his own heart. If a man wishes to know whether he is truly a child of God, and now shares in his paternal regard, and may hope for a share in the heavenly inheritance, let him ask himself the question, "Do I love the Lord Jesus Christ, and instead of opposing and resisting his rightful authority over my soul, am I willing to render affectionate obedience to his commandments?" It is a very simple test-question, and as it is answered, Christ becomes the revealer of the actual disposition of the heart before God. How does a man

know that he is a child of God? Because he loves Christ.

But Christ said even more than that. On one occasion he said, "He that honoreth the Son, honoreth the Father;" and on another occasion he declared the same truth in opposite language, "He that hateth me hateth my Father also." Love and hate are the two opposing passions of the soul, into which all its emotions may be resolved. And whichever passion a man feels towards Christ he also feels towards God. It is impossible to love God without loving the manifested Son of God. And, on the other hand, it is impossible to be indifferent to the person and claims of Jesus Christ without showing unpardonable disrespect to him who sent him, and whose will he came on earth to accomplish. Aside from all essential unity between Father and Son, they are so one in spirit, so one in purpose, so one in moral attributes, so one in their love for a lost race, that they can not excite different emotions in the same heart. It will be either honor and love, or it will be indifference and hatred. The visible Christ becomes the unmistakable revealer of the soul's disposition towards the invisible Father.

The authorized agent of a house represents the house in authority and dignity, and is to be treated as such. The honored son of a family carries with him all the family honor, and becomes its representative

wherever he is. The ambassador of a nation or the prince of a kingdom represents the name, the power, the dignity of the government or throne, and whatever is shown to him of respect and honor, or of neglect and insult, is shown to the government or throne which is behind him, and which he represents. Christ was God's visible representative on earth ; he was Heaven's first citizen, aye, the Son and Prince of God's eternal kingdom, having all power in heaven and in earth, and the key of the government on his shoulders, and the destinies of men in his hands ; aye, he was "God manifest in the flesh," revealing to us through that fleshy veil, (which concealed, as well as revealed), the person, the will, the glory of Deity, showing to us more of God than man ever knew or could have known, and representing in his person the dignity and glory of the throne of God ; and so God says, as Christ is welcomed or rejected, so am I ; as Christ is honored or dishonored, so am I ; as Christ is loved or despised, so am I. Your treatment of him will be your treatment of me ; and your disposition towards him will indicate your disposition towards me.



XXIII. CHRIST THE REVEALER.

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CHRIST THE REVEALER.

The perfect teachings of Christ hold the mirror up to the hearts of men, and in this way their moral condition is revealed to them. We are not entirely dependent upon the teachings of Christ for our knowledge of moral duty. We all have conscience and moral sense, the faculty of distinguishing between right and wrong, and of discerning the moral virtues, such as honesty, industry, chastity, temperance. There is such a thing as natural morality, and a primary table of laws in the universal heart of man. As Paul said, when the heathen who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, they are a law unto themselves. This we all admit. And I think we are quite ready to admit, also, that however imperfect this code of morals may be, it is not kept by any man. Every conscience is an accusing conscience. No man lives up to its teachings.

But when Christ came, the divine Teacher, he outstripped all other teachers of morals. He imparted fresh life to conscience itself. He gave new force and beauty and comprehensiveness to moral law. Our Saviour, he who came to redeem us and whom we are to acknowledge as Lord, as Master, began his work of

redemption by exalting the standard of morals which men had permitted to drop so low, and by widening the sphere of morals until it embraced all conduct and life. Every act became a moral act. And his teachings not only applied to the outward act, but to the inner motive as well. He took a lighted candle and went down into the dark, subterranean passages of the soul, and brought the very thoughts to judgment. Hatred was murder; and under his teaching, lust was adultery. Whoever taught it before? How the great moral virtues were not overlooked, nor set aside or made light of, as some men seem to think, but emphasized, exalted, glorified, as he discoursed upon them, until men saw themselves in a new light, and found their judgment of themselves fast changing? Until at length, as with the authority of the Author of all law, he gathered it up and condensed it into two pregnant utterances: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy might, mind and strength," and "thy neighbor as thyself." Well did he say, "If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin; but now they have no cloak for their sin." So great was the contrast that before he opened his lips to teach, men had little consciousness of their sins, but now, in the light that shone from his words, there was nothing that could hide their sins.

What a mirror is the sermon on the mount, polished to a heavenly brightness, and how it discloses, to the

candid eyes that look into it, the moral deformity of heart and life, the utter incompleteness of all human righteousness, and the needs of every soul? Surely, here the thoughts of many hearts have been revealed. Is it possible that some men have never stood face to face with their own image in this divine mirror, and so have no correct impression of their moral self, or, having once looked into it, have since carefully refrained from repeating the act, and have forgotten what manner of persons they are?

Again, not only do we see in the mirror of Christ's perfect teachings the reflection of our true selves, but the perfect life of Christ is the one example for all men, and when we honestly compare ourselves with that, we are still more certain to have a revelation of our guilt and shortcomings.

Christ not only taught us how to live, but he lived it. His life was the perfect illustration of his doctrine. He was himself incarnate truthfulness, incarnate obedience to every holy commandment, incarnate purity, incarnate meekness, incarnate love. He walked in daily and hourly communion with God. He was holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sinners and their sins, in the sense of having no fellowship with the one and no indulgence in the other. Did he live right? Did he live as every one of us ought to live? Has he walked with his sinless feet the one perfect path

which we all ought to follow? Has he set the one perfect example for the race? You all say "yes" to these questions.

Then tell me, please, why men are forever comparing themselves with one another instead of with Christ, and finding in the weakness of human examples the justification of their own weakness. Why do they not compare themselves and their life with Christ and his life? What possible good can any other comparison do them?

And tell me, please, why, if Christ is the one example for us all, men are forever setting up two standards of morality and life, one for others and another for themselves, one for the priests and another for the laity, one for the ministers and another for the people? Pray tell me, on what principle men demand that a minister shall live a more holy, a more consistent, a purer life, and one freer from sin and sinful indulgences than the life which they demand of themselves, and that the associations of a minister's home shall be more spiritual and not so worldly and sinful as the associations which they allow in their own homes. Is there such a thing as an official sanctity, or an official morality, which pertains to a man because of his office? Are we not all to be kings and priests unto God, ministers at the sacred altar of home? Are we not all to be perfect as God is perfect, as Christ is perfect? I claim the right, as a minister of Christ, to do in the realm of

morals whatever it is right for my people to do ; or, to put it better, I claim that God does not require of me a more holy life than he requires of all my people. He requires that you should be perfectly holy, and surely he can not require me to be any thing more. To put your minister in your place, or better still, to put Christ in your place, may be a quick method of determining the right or wrong, the morality or immorality of any course of action. The time has gone by, if it ever was, when the clergyman was regarded as the only one who was bound to illustrate the purity, the spirituality, the moral beauty of the gospel of Christ.

Oh, if Christ be the one example for us all, let us cease having a double standard of living and choosing the lower one for ourselves, and let us cease comparing ourselves with one another, for purposes of self-justification or self-condemnation.

Am I like Christ? is the one question for us all. We may sing,

“ I love to kiss each print where thou
Hast set thine unseen feet ; ”

but how often do we put our feet in the prints of his feet, and walk the path he trod of holiness and of life ! When we think of the moral beauty and harmony, the symmetry, the completeness, the absolute perfection of his life, how imperfect and unworthy and sinful are the best lives which we see among men ?

I acknowledge that there have been noble illustrations of personal piety, those who seemed to walk with God from day to day, whose spirits were filled with a heavenly sweetness, and whose lives were bright with a heavenly light, and we have wished we might be like them. But Jesus, our only model, is so far above us and them, that the greatness of his moral stature does but impress us with the littleness of our own, and the resplendent beauty of his life does but reveal the blemishes and deformity of ours. Who of us can look at the portrait of Jesus, as it is drawn by the pen of Matthew or Mark or Luke or John, so full of grace and truth, and not be compelled to confess what a contrast between that and this! how unlike, how unlike I am to Jesus! And so Jesus becomes the revealer of human hearts, and in contrast with his perfect righteousness we are made to see our unrighteousness.

But to what end? Why is Christ the revealer of human hearts? We acknowledge that we are not like the model which God has given us, that we are not what we ought to be. What step shall we take next? "Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." "If we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Is it wise for us to follow God's directions? The revelation of one's self is

but the first step in God's plan of salvation. It is to be followed by sincere repentance, a humble faith in Christ, and an entrance upon the new life. Do you not recognize these as the well-known landmarks of this old gospel of the grace of God? First and foremost, the knowledge of yourself, the deep consciousness of your soul's need. Second, godly sorrow for sin. Third, the personal acceptance of our Almighty Saviour. And fourth, the beginning of that new life which shall end both in his presence and in his likeness.

The blind man, conscious of his distressing need, as he heard the footsteps of the passing Jesus, cried with a loud voice, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." And when they sought to make him hold his peace, he having some faint conception of the blessing he might gain or lose, cried so much the more, saying, "Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me." His prayer was heard, and into his sightless eyeballs there dawned the light of a new life and a new world. May we all, conscious of our spiritual need and blindness, cry aloud to the passing Christ, that in the light which he shall give, there may be revealed to us the depths of our sinning hearts and the heights of his saving mercy, the thoughts of God's heart, as well as the thoughts of our hearts, for Christ is the divinely appointed revealer of both.

XXIV. THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE,
PART I.

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THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE.

PART I.

Very much is said at the present time about the religion of the future and the church of the future. Some men, thinking that they see indications that the prevailing faith in Christianity is going to pieces, and that the present system of things is about to undergo some great change or upheaval, are seriously inquiring what will be the nature of the coming faith and the character of the coming religion. Into their little balance they put Romanism, with its hoary superstitions, and Protestantism, with its numerous sects, and find them both wanting. In their judgment, indeed, Christianity, which has served the world for so many centuries and has produced such glorious results, is quite outgrown, and must give way before the new faith which is advancing so rapidly upon us. As Judaism was superseded by Christianity, so Christianity, they tell us, is to be superseded by — something else. And this something else, these prophets do not hesitate to say, will be the joint product of science and reason. They do not define it very minutely, and are not altogether agreed in their descriptions of it. But on these two points there seems

to be harmony of opinion — the new religion will be scientific, and it will be reasonable. It will exclude everything supernatural, for that is unscientific and of the nature of superstition. It will contain no Saviour and no atonement, for none are needed. Its two great principles will be — faith in the laws of nature, and faith in man. On these two principles it expects to work out the problem of human destiny and the salvation of the soul.

The thought I wish to suggest is this, that notwithstanding the confident assertions of these would-be prophets as to the speedy overthrow of Christianity and the introduction of a new religion, the religion of the future, the church of the future, will be *founded upon the word of God*, and not upon the discoveries of science or the utterances of human reason. The future religion, the future faith will be identical with a spiritual and biblical Christianity. It will not contravene the facts of established science; it will not contradict the teachings of enlightened reason and conscience; but it will rest solidly upon the revealed truth of the sacred Scriptures.

For, in the first place, Christianity claims to be a final revelation and the final religion. No one can read its sacred records without being convinced that while there was much that went before it and pre-

pared the way for it, there is nothing that is to come after it and supersede it.

Look at its plain assertions as to its permanence and perpetuity. Christ himself said, "For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled." And again he said: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away." In the judgment of Christ the revealed will of God, as contained in his word, the system of religion which he came to proclaim, the words which he spoke, were final, enduring, eternal. They had in them the seeds of immortality; the power of an endless life. They should not pass away. The whole visible order of things in the material universe should pass away, but they should remain. These are but samples of the many assertions in the New Testament as to the permanence and unchangeableness of the religion of Christ. Christ never and nowhere intimated that the Christian system should be outgrown or set aside, or that it was preparatory for anything but heaven itself. And so Peter, speaking of the word of God, said, "which liveth and abideth forever," and contrasted it with the transient nature of man himself and everything human. "For all flesh is as grass and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth and the flower thereof fall-

eth away" (men, nations, and generations disappear and come to an end), "but the word of the Lord endureth forever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." In other words, the lives of men, the opinions and earth-born faiths of men, are transient and of short duration; but the religion of Christ, this gospel of our Christian faith, "liveth and abideth forever."

Look, again, at the exclusiveness of Christianity. It does not allow for an instant that anything can arise to take its place, or that anything can be superior, or that anything else can be a gospel of salvation for the soul. We live in a time when men are engaged in the study of comparative religion, finding points of agreement and disagreement between the religions which have dominated different nations and different ages. This is an exceedingly fascinating study; but when it makes men eclectics in religion, finding good in all religions and acknowledging the superiority of none, its influence is pernicious and deadly. For Christ said not to his own time merely, but to all ages and the men of all ages, "I am the way, the truth, and the life;" and again, "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber," — language which strongly and positively forbids us to think that Christ allowed any

rival saviour or any rival salvation, and which declares as distinctly as language can declare it, that there is not now and cannot be in the future any other religion which contains a trustworthy promise of eternal life.

The apostles so understood it. Peter said, "Neither is their salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Paul declared with a boldness which startles the uncertain, compromising spirit of our day, "For though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed." Enlightened by God's Spirit as to the saving truth of the gospel, Paul could not swerve from it a hair's breadth or make the slightest concession to error or superstition, however plausible or hoary. This, he said, is the gospel of the Son of God, and though an angel's lips should attempt to substitute for it something else, let him be anathema. The world need expect no other gospel than that which he preached, and he who undertook to preach any other, need expect only God's judgments. And the loving apostle John was no less severe against those who might attempt to set aside, modify, or improve this perfect, everlasting gospel. "If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book. And if any man shall take

away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life." These words undoubtedly refer primarily to the book of Revelation, but by a perfectly legitimate inference they apply to the whole gospel. Christ's gospel makes no provision for a successor, and leaves no room for the introduction of another. It says, I am God's word of life; I am God's method of salvation for lost men; I am *the* gospel, and there is, and there can be, no other.

Look, too, at the foretold increase and universal triumph of Christianity. Christ's disciples were commanded to go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature; not this gospel for a time and then something else; not this gospel to a part of the world and something different to the rest, but this gospel to every creature. This is the one message which is to be preached everywhere and in all ages of the world. Have men already a religion? Preach to them this. Are they savage or civilized? Preach to them this. Do they think that it did well enough for a past age, but that this age has outgrown it? Preach to them this same old gospel. "Into all the world." "To every creature." And what are we told shall be the result of this world-wide preaching? Listen. "Every knee shall bow," not to the revelations of science, and not to any idol philosophy which the most enlightened human rea-

son may set up, but "*at the name of Jesus* every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that he is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." The religion that is to be preached to all men, and is to command the reverence of all men, introducing no other, yielding to no other, and superseded by no other, is, we are told, the religion of Jesus Christ. This is its claim and its prophecy, and we may calmly believe it and act upon it, and not be troubled by the feeble utterances of self-constituted prophets who think themselves wiser than the Son of God.



XXV. THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE,
PART II.



THE RELIGION OF THE FUTURE.

PART II.

The previous paper presented the claim of Christianity to be the permanent and final religion. There are undoubtedly some persons who do not acknowledge the force of such a claim made by the Christian religion in its own behalf. It may therefore be said, in the second place, in proof of the permanence of the religion of Christ, that it is evermore adapted to the unchanging nature of man, his constitution, his moral condition and needs.

One of the most unchanging things in this world is human nature. You may look at it in different lands and times, under many complexions and under many skies, and you will find the most striking proofs of its identity. The external circumstances may be different; there may be more or less culture, more or less wealth, more or less refinement and civilization; but within is the same heart, stirred by like passions, influenced by like temptations, touched by like joys and sorrows, impelled by like motives and desires, and hopes, filled with common needs which only God can supply—the same sinning, loving, sorrowing, heaven-desiring, im-

mortal spirit within us all. Men may live before the blessed coming of Christ or after; they may dwell under American or European, African or Asiatic skies; they may be born at the dawn, or the noonday, or the sunset of the world; they may be clothed in purple and a palace be their home, or they may lie, like Lazarus, a beggar at the palace gate — they bear the marks of a common lineage and a common brotherhood. “God hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth.” To this same unchanged and unchanging nature which is the common possession of us all, the religion of Jesus Christ comes with its wonderful, its divine, its saving adaptation. The same bread feeds us, and the same bread of life. The same water refreshes us, and the same water of salvation. The same air sustains us, and the same enveloping and inflowing grace and favor of God. Man cannot outgrow the bread which satisfies his hunger or the water which quenches his thirst. Man cannot outgrow the atmosphere which fills his lungs and purifies his blood. No more can he outgrow the need of the hope-inspiring and life-giving faith of the gospel. Man can never outgrow Christianity, because with his unchanging nature he can never outgrow the need of Christ.

Just see how wonderfully adapted the religion of Christ is to the nature and needs of man. It quickens and expands his intellect, it touches and purifies his

affections ; it enlightens and strengthens his conscience ; it renews his spirit and conforms his will to the divine ; it subdues his passions ; it controls his desires ; it enriches and elevates his thoughts ; it secures his pardon ; it reconciles him to God and gives him peace ; it comforts him in sorrow and strengthens him in temptation ; it helps him to bear life's burdens and to fulfil life's mission ; it fits him for this world and for the next ; it makes him unselfish, generous, forgiving, loving, pure, Christ like ; it lights up his home with a heavenly brightness, and cheers his pathway with a blessed hope ; it makes the end of life the beginning of glory, and opens for him the very gates of heaven and the golden streets of immortality. No antidote was ever more successful in overcoming poison than Christianity in overcoming sin. No medicine was ever more powerful in healing the body than the religion of Christ in healing the soul. No key ever fitted its lock more beautifully than this gospel-key when applied to the nature of man.

A Chinese student, himself a teacher among his pagan countrymen, was received by the missionary, Bishop Boone, into his family, to assist him in the translation of the Scriptures into the Chinese language. For a long time he was unaffected by what he read, except by its literary beauty. At length one day he rose suddenly from his work with the New Testament

in his hand, as if some great discovery had burst upon his mind, and exclaimed, "Whoever made this book made me. It knows all the thoughts of my heart. It tells me what none but a God can know about me. Whoever made me made that book." The key had found its lock and the lock its key.

So long, therefore, as God's word remains unchanged, and human nature remains unchanged, the religion, the faith, and the church of the future will be the religion, the faith, and the church of Jesus Christ. Man needs and man will need no other religion than this. This meets his every spiritual want. Christ in the soul, and it is full. Christ in the life, and it is glorified. Christ in the man, and he is complete.

Let no man waste a single hour in conjecturing what will be the religion of the future, or in devising some new form of faith. Let us rather use what we have, that which by the gospel is preached unto us. It is good enough. It is just what we need, and it is all we need. It comes to us with divine authority and absolute certainty. Man wants more than conjectures and guesses, if he would have peace and life. Mr. Froude says "We cannot live on probabilities. The faith in which we can live bravely and die in peace, must be a certainty, so far as it professes to be a faith at all, or it is nothing." The faith of the gospel is faith in that

word "which endureth forever." It puts rock under the sinking feet. It puts peace and hope into the penitent spirit. It puts purity and the fountain of life into the trusting heart. It puts gladness and righteousness into this sad, weak life of ours. It puts a crown of glory on the throbbing brow, and everlasting praises on the lips redeemed.

No man need fear for the progress and permanence of Christianity. It has been, is, and shall be till the end of the world, "the wisdom and the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth." While God's word is true, while man is man, and his nature is weak, sinful, human, while the world stands and time endures, this blessed gospel is to be preached, and men are to be saved by it.

Only fear lest any of you should neglect this great salvation or should accept in its place some miserable and powerless substitute, and build upon the yielding sand the structure of your immortal hopes, the house of the imperishable soul. Or fear lest having accepted this divine gospel, this priceless expression of God's love, this final and only hope of a perishing world, it may fail to bring forth the expected and abundant fruits of righteousness in every life and heart. This is evermore the good seed of the kingdom. Let it fall

into your own hearts. Scatter it in the hearts of others.

“All this world is God’s own field,
Fruit unto his praise to yield;
Wheat and tares therein are sown,
Unto joy and sorrow grown;
Ripening with a wondrous power,
Till the final harvest hour;
Grant, O Lord of Life, that we
Holy grain and pure may be.”





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